1950

John Galsworthy's portrayal of feminine character in his novels

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

JOHN GALSWORTHY'S PORTRAYAL OF FEMININE CHARACTER IN HIS NOVELS

by

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(A.B., Hiram College, 1936)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1950

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TOPICAL OUTLINE

Chapter I.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem

In 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote in A Room of One's Own, speaking particularly of John Galsworthy and Rudyard Kipling:

> ... some of the finest works of our greatest living writers fall upon deaf ears. Do what she will a woman cannot find in them that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there. It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible.... The fact is that neither Mr. Galsworthy nor Mr. Kipling has a spark of the woman in him. Thus all their qualities seem to a woman, if one may generalize, crude and immature. They lack suggestive power. And when a book lacks suggestive power, however hard it hits the surface of the mind it cannot penetrate within.[1]

This was a new light on John Galsworthy to a woman who had begun to read his books with rather uncritical zest, and those of Mrs. Woolf with respect for her intellect and enthusiasm for her ideas. But it was a tantalizing light, and one in which I could not help trying to see Galsworthy's books as I read on.

First, what was the basic meaning of this paragraph in A Room of One's Own (which is, of course, a manual of advice

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[1]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), pp. 177-78.

to woman writers)? The obvious meaning was, that Galsworthy was uninteresting and incomprehensible to the woman reader, because his viewpoint was pre-eminently male. The fact that a woman reader--several woman readers, to my knowledge--could and did thoroughly enjoy many of Galsworthy's novels seemed to be either a disproof of Mrs. Woolf's statement or an indication of something lacking in the judgment of the reader.

The fact is, of course, neither absolutely one nor the other. Mrs. Woolf, in spirit one of the least dogmatic of authors, was far from condemning Galsworthy as totally uninteresting to any woman reader; she very probably liked reading him herself, or she could not have judged him so keenly. She was using his way of writing--his outlook--as an example of certain current literary tendencies against which, in reverse, she was cautioning woman authors. "... it is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex,"[2] she wrote. Her idea of the truly creative mind is summed up as follows:

> And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The

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[2] Ibid., p. 181.

> normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman must also have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought.[3]

Reading and re-reading Galsworthy's novels in this new light, one may find on the surface many apparent contradictions of Mrs. Woolf's opinion. If a male-minded author, Galsworthy certainly does not belong to the "man of action" group exemplified by Captain Marryat, for instance, to whom women are mainly incidental motives for adventure and achievement. Women are prominent in all his novels, and they are alive and individual. People who read Galsworthy speak of Irene, Fleur, and "that nice girl in his last books" (Dinny Charwell) at least as often as they speak of Soames, the old and young Jolyons, and Michael Mont.

Moreover--and in this respect he is unlike many modern authors, women among them--Galsworthy tends to view his woman characters with very sympathetic eyes. Some of the minor ones he treats sardonically--perhaps for purposes of contrast--but of his major ones, about the only near approach

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[3] Ibid., pp. 170-71.

to a villainess is Helen Bellew. And when their stories have endings not altogether happy, it is society or some exterior circumstance that defeats them, not their own sins--though in certain cases, as those of Gyp Winton and of Fleur Forsyte, some trait of character is involved.

Nor does Galsworthy confine himself to a male viewpoint in the telling of his stories. Very often his heroines' thoughts and feelings are given at first hand; several of his books are presented mainly from the leading woman's point of view, Beyond, and the three books comprising End of the Chapter, for example. In To Let, the last volume of The Forsyte Saga, and in the first two parts of The Dark Flower, woman protagonists share the stage about equally with the men.

So, on the surface of it, Galsworthy does not seem to devote himself entirely to the world of men. But Mrs. Woolf's criticism goes much deeper. Still staying fairly close to the surface, one might take a look at the world that forms the background of Galsworthy's books, and see what it is like. A world of inherited country houses, and family mansions purchased by newly rich business men; of men's clubs, law-courts, and Parliament chambers; of racing-stables and hunting-fields--surely pretty much a man's world externally. There are more neutral places like picture galleries, to be sure, and concert halls, and family dining-

rooms; but when we retire from these, it is likely to be to some masculine sanctum. Galsworthy is a little unsure of his ground when he crosses over into the feminine domain. He likes to see his girls out riding or rowing with their men, looking at paintings with them, or talking to them among the flowers in their gardens. Sometimes he will follow them into the house, notice their interior decorating, and watch over their shoulders while they plan the day's schedule or the next party; but he is more at ease when the man of the house comes in. And what do they do with their time when their men are away from them? Play the piano, visit the poor, and dream about their men, generally.

Mrs. Woolf, speaking of the women created in fiction up until the nineteenth century, says:

> ... almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex.[4]

One cannot escape the conclusion that the women in Galsworthy's novels share this situation with their predecessors. They may be friendly enough with one another, but other relationships are trivial compared to those with their lovers, or perhaps their fathers or sons.

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[4] Ibid., p. 143.

Nor can one avoid noticing that Galsworthy frequently turns to these men to help him interpret his heroines. The viewpoint of his story very often shifts, almost imperceptibly, from the woman in question to a devoted father, affectionate uncle, or loyal husband standing by her. Galsworthy is much more at ease when watching a woman than when interpreting her. She can be very well known through observation and speculation, but getting inside her mind is something else again.

2. Plan of Thesis

The foregoing paragraphs have, after all, only scratched the surface of Mrs. Woolf's criticism.

> Do what she will a woman cannot find in them [Galsworthy's novels] that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there. It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible.[5]

One needs to study Galsworthy's books rather closely to find out in exactly what aspects of his work he merits, or transcends if he does, that subtle criticism. And few indeed among us have the mind and the literary background of a Virginia Woolf to bring to the study. But the words are provocative.

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[5] Woolf, loc. cit.

In the light of these words, and the others quoted, I have elected to write about the heroines of John Galsworthy's novels, and try to discover how, in his development of them, he justifies Mrs. Woolf's criticism, or how, on the contrary, he shows evidence of the "androgynous mind." One of the most important tests denoting such a mind is, I think, the appeal a man author's heroines have for the woman reader, the completeness with which they gain her sympathy and interest; the converse is true for a woman author. Within the limits of my observation and understanding, I shall try to discover which of his heroines have this appeal and which lack it.

In the pursuit of this study I have depended mainly on John Galsworthy's novels for ideas, but have also consulted biographical and critical material in book and magazine form.

The following chapter will be a general survey, attempting to show how Galsworthy's social background affected and perhaps limited his observation of feminine character. Each of the next three chapters will be devoted primarily to one of the woman characters by whom he is best known: Irene Forsyte of The Forsyte Saga, Fleur Forsyte Mont of the Saga and A Modern Comedy, and Dinny Charwell of End of the Chapter. Each of these women will be treated as a climactic figure in some phase of Galsworthy's work, and will be compared with other feminine personalities in his novels who fall into the same general grouping. Irene is the most complete example of the

ideal, symbolic woman, who recurs throughout his early novels as certain themes recur, often in conjunction with them. Fleur, although a unique personality among Galsworthy's heroines, has her predecessors among his other young girls in love and some of his married women. She is at the opposite pole from Irene, the most real and most complex of the galaxy. Dinny Charwell represents Galsworthy's most conspicuous attempt to see the universe from a feminine viewpoint.

The concluding chapter will seek to determine whether, as his career progressed, Galsworthy did tend to develop the "androgynous mind"; if he, in his depiction of women, ever attained "that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself."[6]

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[6] Woolf, A Room of One's Own, pp. 161-62.

Chapter II.

GALSWORTHY, A MAN OF HIS ORDER

1. The Aristocrat

In making a general survey of Galsworthy's works, one ultimately reaches the conclusion that he is essentially a man of his order--a man of the station, country, and sex to which he was born. Socially, he is always the aristocrat. Capable of deep sympathy with those by birth less fortunate--the greater part of his early literary output, his plays in particular, is a cry for social justice--he makes his appeal to his own class; to their sense of pity and responsibility; not, basically, to the pride and initiative of the lower classes themselves. Nor do those who represent the lower classes, in his novels at any rate, have over-much pride or initiative.

Galsworthy, for all his sympathy and indignation, is never really at one with them. One cannot imagine him living any more happily among them than did Thyme Dallison. The richness and variety of characterization he finds among the aristocracy and the upper middle classes is noticeably lacking when he takes us among his unfortunate brethren. They are, to be blunt, a rather spiritless lot.

This, to the mind of an American, makes Galsworthy the essential Englishman he was at heart. Sharp divisions of class, with corresponding economic limitations, are strange to the American way of thinking; they may exist here, but they are not rigidly fixed by chance of birth. The Forsytes, to be sure, were children of opportunity; but Galsworthy never advises the poor to emulate the Forsytes. He really never advises them to do anything at all.

So, in his novels, those outside his class do not carry much of the plot's burden. They are always secondary in importance; always objects of the activity, not its agents, unless, as in the case of Bob Tryst, they are urged on. There are no heroes among them, and no heroines, although one Cockney girl has a certain heroism in her nature.

When we get away from our scrutiny of Galsworthy's heroines, and turn our attention to the Forsyte aunts and cousins, to the various "ladies of the manor", we find his gift for characterization flourishing on fertile ground. Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester Forsyte, for all they play a small part in the Saga, are, each in her own way, staunch custodians of the Forsyte spirit. We meet and re-meet them with a sort of familiar affection, for most people have aunts, and the unmarried ones in particular are likely to make their homes, as "Timothy's on the Bayswater Road" was, an exchange-center for family gossip, and to be deeply

concerned about family unity. And one, like Aunt Juley, usually manages to "put her foot in it."

In his earlier novels, Galsworthy shows some capability in realistic portraitures of young women. The Pendyce girls in A Country House, the modern-minded Francie and Euphemia Forsyte, whose family conversations with Aunts Juley and Hester provoke spontaneous laughter, show that Galsworthy was aware (as one after surveying Barbara and Olive and Gyp is moved to doubt) that not all young women are ideally beautiful or perfectly self-possessed. None of these girls are prominent. Little June Forsyte is, though. June is a Forsyte through and through, but she has Forsytism in a more attractive form than most of her relatives; it expresses itself mainly in a penchant for collecting "lame ducks", unfortunate people to whom she can do good. Her heart "as warm as the colour of her hair"[1] rules her Forsyte head, and that is probably why she is so likeable in spite of her tendency to rush in where angels fear to tread.

June is Irene's rival in A Man of Property; when her fiancé, Philip Bosinney, turns from her to Irene, and when he later on dies under the wheels of an omnibus, she suffers a broken heart; but she recovers and leads a vigorous, somewhat

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[1] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 87.

eccentric life of her own. She warmly champions the cause of young Jon and Fleur against their parents, and at the end of the Saga we see her comforting Fleur: "Nobody can spoil a life, my dear. That's nonsense. Things happen, but we bob up."[2]

Another author, say Arnold Bennett, could have devoted a whole book to someone like June, treating her with a combination of sympathy and caricature. But that was not Galsworthy's way with his heroines.

The "ladies of the manor", women of the "squirearchy" and the titled aristocracy, Galsworthy also knew very well. Lady Valleys of The Patrician, her redoubtable mother Lady Casterley, the narrow-minded Lady Malloring of The Freelands, and Lady Emily Mont, Michael's mother, with her delightful irrelevancies in conversation--he understands them all, their mental processes, the bounds of their avowed liberalism, the subconscious depth of their conservatism. Galsworthy never forgets what they stand for--never, when reading his early novels especially, is it wise to forget his tendency to make his characters represent something--but neither does he lose sight of their humanity; and this is why his books lack thorough-going villains and villainesses. In his understanding of these women whose major activities lie outside the field of the love-relationship, Galsworthy may transcend

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[2] Ibid., p. 908.

Mrs. Woolf's criticism.

As a commentator on his own class, Galsworthy usually makes one personality in a novel his spokesman. When young Jolyon Forsyte audibly or mentally comments on his clan, or Felix Freeland expresses his views about the land, we hear the voice of Galsworthy speaking. In The Country House, however, there is a different technique. The figure of Margery Pendyce stands out, not so much as an observer--though she makes several pertinent remarks--as a not inharmonious contrast to the society in which she lives. She resembles a lovely little winged insect caught in a web, having no thought to escape from it, yet not quite happy about it.

Mrs. Pendyce (neé Totteridge) is the wife of the country squire, Horace Pendyce, and mother of young George, whose affair with Helen Bellew motivates the story. She is a woman in middle life, gentle and pretty, a thorough lady, with something a little ageless about her--a quality that enables one to perfectly visualize the girl she was and the old lady she will be. For all her perfect taste and general conventionality, she has a rare intuition that makes her able to sympathize with many a social black sheep against the tongue-cluckers. For many years she has accepted the routine of her life with a self-centered husband, denying herself and her personal wishes for the sake of home and family. However, when the critical issue of her son's romance with

Helen Bellew threatens to precipitate a divorce action by Mrs. Bellew's husband, Mrs. Pendyce risks a break with her own husband to stand by her son. Again, when Helen abruptly tires of George and breaks with him, Mrs. Pendyce's instinct for comfort helps him through a bad hour. And finally, the lady of the house is able, by her very gentleness and breeding, to do what her husband's pride will not allow him to attempt; she sees Jaspar Bellew and wins a promise that he will halt divorce proceedings and spare the good name of her family.

The potentialities in this situation for excessive sentiment are obvious, as are the potentialities for caricature. One knowing only the outline of the story might be tempted to compare Mrs. Pendyce's visit to Jaspar Bellew with the ill-starred visit of Bessie Tulliver to Mr. Wakem in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss. It is one of Galsworthy's most notable achievements in characterization that he makes the successful mission convincing without sentimentality or satire. Margery Pendyce is both likeable and believable. Perhaps it is her simplicity, a certain childlike quality in her make-up, that keeps her from being too good to be true. She surpasses herself when she says to her cousin Gregory: "In the country, Grig, all women would like to be men, but they don't dare to try. They trot behind."[3]

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[3] John Galsworthy, The Country House (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 79.

Margery is not really typical of her class. She is one of Galsworthy's specials. Frances Fleeming Freeland, a much older matron, is a true "upper middle-class" type; she is supposed to be modelled on Galsworthy's own mother.[4] Although her part in The Freelands is not organic to the story, as is Margery's in The Country House, it would be a far poorer book without her. The mother of four Freeland men, grandmother of their children, Frances Freeland has defeated the vicissitudes of her long life by either accepting or ignoring them. Her sons and grandchildren love and admire her, for the very qualities which keep her world within its narrow bounds. Her son Felix observes her:

> How formal, chiselled, and delicate her face, yet how almost fanatically decisive! How frail and light her figure, yet how indomitably active! And the memory assailed him of how, four years ago, she had defeated double pneumonia without having a doctor, simply by lying on her back. "She leaves trouble," he thought, "until it's under her nose, then simply tells it that it isn't there. There's something very English about that."[5]

She has the mentality peculiar to many "family women" whose training has not encouraged them to think objectively:

> Frances Freeland ... kept facts and theories especially unrelated, or, rather modified her facts to suit her theories, instead of, like Felix, her theories to suit her facts.
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[4] H. V. Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1935), p. 52.

[5] John Galsworthy, The Freelands (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 272.

> It had sometimes touched him horribly to see with what despair she made attempts to follow him in his correlating efforts, and with what relief she heard him cease enough to let her say: "Yes, dear; only, I must show you this new kind of expanding cork. It's simply splendid. It bottles up everything!"[6]

For Frances Freeland, so conservative in her views of Church and State, and all that pertains to them, yet has a tolerance and a liking for the new, in the shape of material gadgets, and the healing ointments she constantly inflicts on her family.

From the family albums of his own social class Galsworthy has indeed produced a wealth of portraits. From such sources come his best ones; for outside his class he has not the same sureness of touch. Now and again he journeys off his own ground, into the realm of the poor--"those streets" as he calls them in Fraternity, or, as in The Freelands, into country cottages. But he never stays long; rather, he tends to bring people out as ambassadors.

Some of these ambassadors are young women, like Ivy Barton in Fraternity and Daphne Wing in Beyond. These girls have in common a certain pathetic quality, a touch of self-deprecation, of conscious social inferiority, in contrast to their rather aggressive behavior with the men who appeal to them. They come into the upper social world as disturbing

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[6] Ibid., pp. 268-269.

sex influences; though the disturbance they create is violent, they themselves tend to be unfortunate.

Ivy, indeed, functions almost entirely as such an influence, very attractively embodied. She is an artists' model, who poses for the talented Bianca Dallison; she is always referred to as "the little model", even when it would be far more convenient for the author to call her by name. She falls in love with Bianca's already partly estranged husband, Hilary, a man whose whimsical tolerance of everything has made him incapable of feeling very strongly about anything. He is attracted by Ivy and considers eloping with her, but in the end her very humanity repels him, and he goes his way alone. The reader knows very little about Ivy, save that she has a "past", that she hasn't much to say, and that in her soft, reticent manner she can be very tenacious in pursuit. She seems at first to have depth, but that may be only her genious for eloquent silences. In the author's mind, she seems to be more a temptation than a personality.

Daphne Wing, on the other hand, is voluble. At the drop of a hat she lays bare her "common little soul",[7] and this trait of "commonness" Galsworthy streeses to a point that seems a little snobbish to an American. Daphne is certainly shallow, though her line of conversation is not

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[7] John Galsworthy, Beyond (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p.

much sillier than that of the average "bobby-soxer", and would be heard among girls of all classes in America at times. She is a dancer of real talent, who at an early stage of her career becomes enamoured of Gyp Winton's husband, the violinist Fiorsen. There is an intrigue, but he deserts her. She suffers heart-break and disgrace, at which stage she says to Gyp, "I don't seem to have any pride."[8] But she ultimately lands on her feet, hardened but not visibly deepened.

Though there is something touching about "the little model", neither of these girls arouses much emotion in the reader. Later on, however, in A Modern Comedy, Galsworthy created Victorine Bicket, attractive wife of a devoted and hard-up little Cockney. Victorine is in effect one of Galsworthy's upper-class heroines brought down into the slum areas. Soft, passive, loyal, she has the courage to get employment as an artists' model, even to pose in the "altogether", in order to earn money to take her husband and herself to Australia. She is perhaps Galsworthy's strongest woman character from the lower classes, though there is something of the princess in disguise about her.

One must not forget Wilmet Gaunt, the rogue-eyed country girl of The Freelands. She has a zestful capacity for self-expression, a refreshing audacity: I should like to

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[8] Ibid., p. 212.

have seen more of her. Galsworthy seems to be more at home among the cottagers of rural England than among their brothers and sisters in the London slums, and in his books they have more vitality. The Freelands, and the shorter story The Apple Tree, indicate that Galsworthy might have tapped this vein more frequently and to advantage. As it is, he remains primarily the novelist of the upper middle classes.

2. The Englishman

As Galsworthy in his writing is an aristocrat, so also is he an Englishman. As a young man, critical of his country in the manner of a reformer and idealist, he probably felt himself a citizen of the world. International peace and good-will concerned him deeply; his war stories show his pacifist inclinations. Of his friendliness to America in particular we have plenty of literary evidence, especially in his essays. But there is little to be said for his depiction of fictional characters not English. Of his French, Belgian, Austrian and Swedish people I cannot speak with authority--though surely no nation would be proud to clain the temperamental Fiorsen--but, considering the opportunities Galsworthy had to observe the American, I should have expected something better of him than the superficial half-caricatures he produces. It is not that they are unflattering; they are just not well done. In truth, Galsworthy's literary treatment of Americans is very like his treatment of the poorer

classes. They are unfortunate and pitiable. The two prominent American men in his books are both disappointed in love, seeking to attain English women. One is Francis Wilmot, the pathetically chivalrous Southerner who defends lynching negroes because, he says, "I reckon there's too much space left in this country ... So where we feel strong about a thing, we take the law into our own hands."[9] (Shades of the Wild West!) The other, young Hallorsen, is a quaintly synthetic professor with a cowboy physique. Although a sterling character at heart (unwittingly, he almost brought dishonor on the British Army), he has no chance with Dinny Charwell.

The one American woman, Anne Wilmot, whom Jon Forsyte marries, is more gently treated. She is a nice girl and a loyal wife, but shadowy; except for a few of what Galsworthy conceives as Southern colloquialisms in her speech, she is typical of nowhere. Least of all when she urges her husband to teach her to speak with an English accent!

3. The Man

The foregoing sections have a direct bearing on Galsworthy's attitude towards his woman characters. This, I think, is at root the cause of his meriting criticism like Virginia Woolf's. He finds it hard really to identify him-

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[9] John Galsworthy, A Modern Comedy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) p. 252.

self with those outside his order. He is an aristocrat, an Englishman--and a man. A man, moreover, educated from boyhood in the public schools and the universities of England, apart from girls and women. However much he may admire, and sympathize, he lacks a certain capacity to be at one with his heroines, to lose his identity in theirs.

Virginia Woolf writes:

> Coleridge certainly did not mean, when he said that a great mind is androgynous, that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women; a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretation. Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind. He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. In fact one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind, though it would be impossible to say what Shakespeare thought of women.[10]

Galsworthy's is the sympathy of chivalry; his appeal is to the sportsmanship, the generosity of the male--not to the pride and spirit of his counterpart. And because he does have a "special sympathy" with women, his heroines tend to become idealized.

This does not mean that they lack vitality. Despite a tendency to "type" which runs through a group of them, they are as a whole individual. And in one of them, at least, is performed that miracle of characterization which is perhaps

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[10] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), p. 171.

the greatest favor vouchsafed a literary artist--the rising-up of a created personality in her own right to take possession of a story, seeming almost independent of her creator. This happened many times to Shakespeare; many times to Dickens, but not in the case of his heroines. The fact that it happened once to Galsworthy, in the case of one heroine, Fleur Forsyte, may indicate that he had latent powers beyond the scope of his limitations--as perhaps every artist has.

The tendency to idealization in Galsworthy's heroines is, nevertheless, a fact. This will be discussed at more length in the next chapter, which will deal particularly with those he most tended to idealize, the "type" mentioned above.

Chapter III.

IRENE FORSYTE--THE SYMBOL

1. Irene

A woman friend with whom I had read The Forsyte Saga wrote me, when she had finished reading A Modern Comedy: "I still think it was all Irene's fault. Who did she think she was, anyway?"

Irene's creator thought she was "a concretion of disturbing Beauty impinging on a possessive world."[1]

Irene Forsyte is at once the first and the last in a rather long line of John Galsworthy's heroines, any of whom might deserve to some extent this symbolic definition. She is the first because she appears first, in the book that established his literary reputation, The Man of Property, later Volume One of The Forsyte Saga. After its publication in 1906, no more novels about the Forsytes appeared until the bulk of Galsworthy's other literary work was behind him. In 1917 he continued Irene's story in the novelette Indian Summer of a Forsyte, and by 1920 had brought it to completion in the two novels that completed the Forsyte trilogy, In Chancery and To Let. The central feminine figures of his later books--

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[1] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. xii.

Fleur Mont and Dinny Charwell--are women of different types, with different antecedents. So Irene is a culminating figure in this line as well as a forerunner. In more than one sense she is a culminating figure, for of them all she is the most abstract, the most symbolic, the most completely seen "from the outside".

The theme of The Forsyte Saga is, of course, the sense of property opposed by the spirit of unpossessable beauty.

In his preface to the complete Saga, Galsworthy wrote:

> The word Saga might be objected to on the ground that it connotes the heroic and that there is little of heroism in these pages. But it is used with a suitable irony; and, after all, this long tale, though it may deal with folk in frock coats, furbelows, and a gilt-edged period, is not devoid of the essential heat of conflict. Discounting for the gigantic stature and blood-thirstiness of old days, as they have come down to us in fairy-tale and legend, the folk of the old Sagas were Forsytes, assuredly, in their possessive instincts, and as little proof against the inroads of beauty and passion as Swithin, Soames, or even Young Jolyon.[2]

There comes into the reader's mind the familiar saga of the Trojan Wars, with the ultimate prize--at least, according to legend--the possession of a lovely woman. To a reader at the age to which the Trojan War stories are usually introduced, the adventure is sufficient; the thoughtful older reader might be tempted to ask a couple of questions: Wouldn't much trouble and woe have been spared if someone had thought just to ask Helen of Troy with whom she preferred to stay? And if

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[2] Ibid., p. xi.

she chose Paris, would it really have assuaged Menelaus' injured honor if he proved himself a better fighter? But Helen's preference was apparently the least of all concerns to the gods and heroes. She was merely a stolen prize of battle.

So with Irene. She is one of Helen of Troy's literary descendants; a woman so beautiful as to be almost the abstraction of a man's dream, rather than a real person. This suggestion of unreality is furthered by making her "never ... present, except through the senses of other characters."[3] At the start of the Saga she is married to Soames Forsyte, the most materialistic and possessive of all the materialistic, possessive Forsyte clan. She has married him with some uncertainty and reluctance, but with his promise to set her free if the marriage does not work out well. He, for his part, genuinely loves her, but cannot conceive of her as other than "his property," and is tormented and exasperated by her steadily increasing aversion. After three years of trying to make the best of her bad bargain, Irene meets Philip Bosinney, a promising young architect engaged to Soames' cousin June. He shares Irene's dislike of the Forsyte spirit. When Soames engages him to build a country house, Bosinney and Irene are thrown together, and fall passionately in love. Irene at

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[3] Ibid., p. xii.

first struggles against her feelings, but when Soames, suspicious and jealous, brings a spiteful lawsuit against his architect for over-reaching the price limit on the house's cost, she breaks with her husband and gives herself to her lover. They cannot go away together until the lawsuit has been decided. The tragic climax of the story comes when Soames, seizing an unexpected opportunity, forcibly repossesses his wife--"the supreme act of property,"[4] Galsworthy calls it. Bosinney, on hearing the story, is so upset and distracted that, wandering about in a London fog, he is knocked down and killed by an omnibus. There is some suspicion of suicide (an act, incidentally, which seems as psychologically impossible to me as it did to Edward Garnett and others of Galsworthy's critics). The Man of Property ends with Irene's return to her husband's home in a condition of emotional shock, not fully aware of what she is doing; and with Soames, himself by no means sure how to treat her, closing the door in the face of his cousin Jolyon, who has come to offer her his sympathy.

This ending must have caused a flurry of speculation among Galsworthy's readers. However, the impossible situation was not resolved by the author for over ten years. With the publishing of the rest of the Saga, the truth was learned, doubtless with great relief.

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[4] Ibid., p. 264.

Irene leaves her husband for good on the very night of her return. For twelve years she supports herself by giving music lessons, quite out of touch with the Forsytes except for a brief interlude when she renews her acquaintance with "Uncle Jolyon." Old Jolyon Forsyte and his son, Young Jolyon, represent a branch of the Forsyte tribe more intuitive, generous, and spiritually sensitive than the others. The friendship between the old man and the young woman, who still mourns her lover, is one of the most charming episodes of the whole Saga. On his death Old Jolyon leaves Irene a financial legacy, with instructions to his son to act as her trustee.

At the end of the twelve years Soames Forsyte not unnaturally desires to resume family life--his main objective being a son who can inherit his not inconsiderable property. An attractive French girl, Annette Lamotte, offers possibilities as a wife; but Soames has never divorced Irene. The lapse of twelve years since her former affair makes a divorce on those grounds impossible. He seeks her out to learn what can be done; but the contact arouses all his old feelings for her, and he tries to induce her to return to him. She turns to her trustee, Young Jolyon, for help and advice. Jolyon, a widower, in his turn feels the drawing power of Irene's charm. In the end they become lovers, and thus, ironically, offer Soames the opportunity for a release he no longer desires.

With the divorce decreed, Irene and Jolyon marry, and Soames weds Annette. Both couples have children: a boy, Jon, is born to Irene and Jolyon; but Soames is disappointed in his wish for a son when Annette has a daughter, Fleur, instead. However, his regrets vanish as the little girl grows up. Almost from the first she is the apple of his eye, and through her he learns the meaning of selfless, unpossessive love.

The children grow up unaware of each other's existence. But ultimately they meet--and fall in love. Their parents try every means, short of telling the old sad story, to force them apart; but even the truth, when it finally comes out, does not avail. Indeed, Fleur prevails on her father to give his consent to their marriage. However, young Jon is shaken, because of the strong bond between his mother and himself. His father, in a letter, makes very clear the depth of Irene's feeling against Soames, of her repugnance to a union of Jon with his daughter. Jolyon's death at this crucial moment has a powerful effect on the boy, but it is the sight of his mother's face when Soames comes to speak for Fleur that finally decides him. He breaks off with Fleur and leaves England with his mother.

Between The Man of Property and the rest of the Forsyte Saga, Galsworthy produced several other novels in which the central feminine figure bore certain resemblances to Irene. Three others, at least, follow the same pattern she established --Audrey Noel, Olive Cramier, and Gyp Winton. The similarity

of these four women does not seem to indicate a lack of originality in Galsworthy, for he could, as has already been shown, create other types. He seems, rather, to be striving to depict some ideal of womanhood, and to express the feelings she inspires in man. Quite possibly his own devotion to his wife played some part toward many of his heroines. This theory can be further supported by observing the situation of all these women; their stories turn largely on the point of their being unhappily married and unable to free themselves for legal union with the men they love. As now is known, John Galsworthy and his cousin-by-marriage, Ada, lived for many years as lovers before she obtained her freedom to marry him. The torment of men and women in this ambiguous position is very movingly described by Galsworthy, and to this theme he returns again and again. It is basic to The Man of Property, and occurs, though as a minor motif, in his final novel, Over the River.

2. Traits of Character

Among the traits these heroines have in common are great beauty, an indefinable charm that sways men of all ages and kinds, a certain passivity, or fatalism, and complete absorption in love.

Of Irene's beauty much has been said already.

> The gods had given Irene dark brown eyes and golden hair, that strange combination, provocative of men's glances ... And the full, soft pallor of her neck and shoulders, above a gold-coloured frock, gave to her personality an alluring strangeness.[5]
>
> Her figure swayed, so balanced that the very air seemed to set it moving....But it was at her lips --asking a question, giving an answer, with that shadowy smile--that men looked; they were sensitive lips, sensuous and sweet, and through them seemed to come warmth and perfume like the warmth and perfume of a flower.[6]

None of the Forsytes are quite immune from her charm. Even her father-in-law, James, finds it hard to say anything against her. "Uncle Swithin", despite his age and girth, in her presence fancies himself a gay young blade again. Her first husband, Soames, never entirely gets over her. When well advanced into the seventies, remarried for many years, he one night steals downstairs from his room in an American hotel to watch her, unobserved, as she plays the piano.

It is the three Jolyons--father, son, and grandson--who are most sensitive of all; who see her as a spirit or symbol of Beauty itself. Old Jolyon, when he thinks he may not see her again after his "Indian summer", thinks:

> Did she exist? Had she ever come at all? Or was she but the emanation of all the beauty he had loved and must leave so soon? ... What was she, who was she, did she exist?[7]

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[5] Ibid., p. 40.

[6] Ibid., p. 9.

[7] Ibid., p. 357.

Young Jolyon sees her as "more than a woman ... The spirit of universal beauty, deep, mysterious, which the old painters, Titian, Giorgione, Botticelli, had known how to capture and transfer to the faces of their women ..."[8] and dreams of her as a "chink of beauty"[9] seen through curtains, which he tries to reach. And little Jon, newly aware of his mother's loveliness, asks her what beauty is, and finally answers for himself: "You're it, really, and all the rest is make-believe."[10] It is perhaps the final proof of her power that in the end Jon chooses to stand by her and give up Fleur.

About the quality of passivity in his heroines, Galsworthy has much to say. He seems to attach to it a special meaning, and to admire it greatly. Very early in the Saga he describes Irene as a "passive goddess."[11] It is not, as the author sees it, a quality of lifelessness or dullness or weakness, but rather one indicating serenity, harmony, a fatalistic philosophy, and the strange strength implied in the phrase "passive resistance." Certainly Irene's resistance is passive throughout, but none the less strong and consistent. It exasperates Soames for that very reason. "She was ever

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[8] Ibid., p. 592.

[9] Ibid., p. 576.

[10] Ibid., p. 657.

[11] Ibid., p. 9.

silent, passive, gracefully averse."[12] Quite frequently during the period of their marriage she is outspoken, but never aggressive. She becomes active and positive only when there is one definite course she must follow or be lost. Such instances are her separation from Soames for Bosinney's sake; her departure from his household; her firm refusal to return to him. But, for the most part, she is unwilling, unless forced, to disturb the current of her life. Rather, she accepts what Fate, and her own past decisions, have given her. She is very unwilling to take any positive steps to end Jon's attachment to Fleur. Jolyon urges that the old story be told as soon as the friendship becomes evident. But Irene chooses the more roundabout and seemingly natural way of taking Jon to Spain for awhile, hoping he will forget. Jolyon's letter is written only as a last resort. And even then Irene's opposition to the marriage is "passive resistance." When Soames asks her if she opposes it, she answers: "With all my heart; not with my lips."[13]

Later, referring to the chance that Jon and Fleur may live in the house he once built for Irene--which became her home and Jolyon's--Soames asks if she believes in Nemesis, to which she replies, "Yes."[14]

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[12] Ibid., p. 62.

[13] Ibid., p. 891.

[14] Loc. cit.

The essence of Irene is, however, that she is a woman who lives by her heart; "one of those women ... born to be loved and to love, who when not loving are not living ..."[15] She inspires affection almost universally; women, June for instance, are drawn to her; also children, and animals. When she gives love, she lives for it. She is closed-in, half-alive without it. Outside her relations with the men in her life, we know of only one interest she has: music, which seems to be her emotional outlet.

3. Other Heroines

The ideal of Irene that Galsworthy created seemed to haunt him and demand renewed expression. His next figure comparable to her was in The Patrician, published in 1911. In a somewhat more human, gentler form than the Irene of The Man of Property, Audrey Noel embodied the same ideal. Perhaps the similarity of her situation to Irene's provoked the similarity of character.

Audrey Lees Noel is the woman loved by the patrician himself, Eustace Caradoc, Lord Miltoun. A young man with high ideals and rigid standards of personal honor, he feels that his inherited post in Parliament places on him a tremendous responsibility for aristocratic leadership and example. His personal attachments are few, but strong.

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[15] Ibid., p. 50.

In this beautiful and solitary young woman he sees his perfect mate, the embodiment of his ideal of womanhood.

> She was the incarnation of all he desired. Her hair, her eyes, her form; the tiny tuck or dimple at the corner of her mouth ... her way of moving, a sort of unconscious swaying or yielding to the air; the tone of her voice, which seemed to come not so much from happiness of her own as from an innate wish to make others happy; and that natural, if not robust, intelligence, which belongs to the very sympathetic, and is rarely found in women of great ambitions or enthusiasms--all these things had twined themselves round his heart.[16]

But Mrs. Noel has been married--unhappily--and never divorced. Her husband, a rigid High Church parson, has refused to legalize their separation. She ardently returns Miltoun's love. There remains the question of whether they must separate, love in secret, or live openly together.

Miltoun, who wishes to marry her, brings his family and friends to accept the fact of their love. But he insists the union must be open; otherwise, he will be a hypocrite and unfit to lead the people. All his associates advise secrecy; but though his whole career be threatened, he stands by his principles. It is Audrey who finally, quietly breaks with him, feeling that only unhappiness will result for them both under those circumstances.

Audrey's loveliness resembles that of Irene, though

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[16] John Galsworthy, The Patrician (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 82.

it is less striking; delicacy and sensitivity are emphasized in her case. She has the same "spirit" quality. Though she lives a rather solitary life and comes into contact with few people, she also has the drawing power of charm. The radical leader Courtier feels it, and so in her way does Barbara Caradoc, Miltoun's sister. But the most notable resemblance to Irene is in her passivity.

> She was ... the kind of woman who spoils men by being too nice to them; of no use to those who wish women to assert themselves; yet having a certain passive stoicism, very disconcerting. With little or no power of initiative, she would do what she was set to do with a thoroughness that would shame an initiator; temperamentally unable to beg anything of anybody, she required love as a plant requires water; she could give herself completely, yet remain oddly incorruptible; in a word, hopeless, and usually beloved of those who thought her so.[17]

Barbara, who sympathizes with the lovers, is herself very different; much of her own appeal lies in her activity and vitality. On a visit to Audrey, with some hope of stirring her to free herself, "she felt a little of that impatience which the conquering feel for the passive,"[18] and says to her, "I believe that you are a fatalist."[19]

This fatalism of Audrey's--her unwillingness to take any positive steps for divorce, or changing Miltoun's mind--is perhaps as much responsible for the denouement as is

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[17] Ibid., p. 125.

[18] Ibid., p. 152.

[19] Loc. cit.

Miltoun's conscientiousness.

Sympathy is perhaps the keynote of her character. Miltoun first sees her carrying in her arms a cottager's little boy who has fallen and hurt himself. Though she has little to say throughout the story (none of these women are loquacious; perhaps in fulfillment of another male ideal, they carry their expressive silences almost to extremes), by quick remarks and gestures she shows herself alert to Miltoun's physical and mental well-being. He finally decides he can't be without her when she has nursed him through an attack of brain fever.

Irene has this quality too, but she shows it only occasionally. It is, of course, conspicuously absent in her relations with Soames; most evident with Old Jolyon and with little Jon. Her comforting of Young Jolyon after the death of his son Jolly is a masterpiece of intuition.

And finally, Audrey--though we see her by herself as we never see Irene, and are allowed more than passing glimpses into her mind--has no preoccupation except love. Like Irene, she cares for music, flowers, and attractive home surroundings. Her morale, too, is somewhat dependent on a consciousness of being well dressed. Irene dresses for dinner even when she is alone. Audrey spends much of her solitude taking stock of her appearance, even when she doesn't expect to see Miltoun or anybody else. Galsworthy's attitude toward so-called feminine vanity is more than kindly. Audrey has a

particular passion for small animals, almost an affinity with them. But all these seem to be attributes of her personality, rather than active interests. It is in her nature to be an appreciator; she becomes active only in love.

In 1913 appeared The Dark Flower, a novel in three parts, each devoted to one episode in the love-life of a sculptor, Mark Lennan. Perhaps inevitably for a Galsworthy novel, the object of his greatest love is a woman of the same order as Irene and Audrey.

About Olive Cramier we know less than about any of the other three women discussed here, which is natural enough, since her story is much shorter. She is beautiful, dark-eyed, gentle and graceful, like the others; like them, unhappily married. Her husband is boorishly possessive in a crude, cave-man fashion. (There is more variety among the husbands than among the wives in these instances.) She and Mark fall in love, but for some weeks, tormented by an intangible fear, she will not give herself to him. Finally she yields; they plan to elope. They have one happy evening together in a wood across the river from her home; but as they are rowing back her husband attacks them in the darkness of a backwater, and Olive is thrown from the boat and drowned.

In the short time we are acquainted with her, it would perhaps be superfluous for Olive to appear as other than a lover. The Dark Flower is, in any case, purely a story of emotion. She is not a negative personality at all, but

either Audrey or Gyp might have "stood in" for her. She has the same subtle charm and the same power of attracting men as her predecessors. Not only the sensitive Mark, but her coarser-grained husband love her, each in his way; her middle-aged uncle is concerned about her to the point where it annoys his wife a little. This charm in women Galsworthy often extends to affect animals. Perhaps the episode, twice repeated, of having a lunar moth settle confidingly on Olive's gown is drawing the thread a little fine; but it has enough fanciful speculation involved not to seem improbable.

Mark wonders about her:

> What was it made him love her so? What was the secret of her fascination? Certainly, no conscious enticements. Never did anyone try less to fascinate. He could not recall one single little thing that she had done to draw him to her. Was it, perhaps, her very passivity, her native pride that never offered or asked anything, a sort of soft stoicism in her fibre; that and some mysterious charm, as close and intimate as scent was to a flower?[20]

In Beyond, the story of Gyp Winton, Galsworthy has more to say about the qualities that make for feminine charm than anywhere else in his novels. He is more descriptive, and far less subtle; even a little didactic. Beyond perhaps shows the effect of World War I, although it is not a war story; it was published in 1917, a time when emotions were rather

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[20] John Galsworthy, The Dark Flower (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913) pp. 169-170.

out of hand. The mood of the book is utterly different from that in Fraternity, for example. Much of the writing is exclamatory and over-dramatic. More than that, the whole story gives the impression that Galsworthy was not quite the master of his material.

Galsworthy was attempting to tell the love story of a woman, largely from her own viewpoint. Gyp Winton is a beautiful, sensitive young woman with some musical talent. Orphaned as a child, she is adopted by Major Winton, who, she subsequently learns, is her real father. The keynote of Gyp's character is a capacity for profound, single-hearted devotion.

> ... she inherited his [her father's] capacity for putting all her eggs in one basket.... Though she never realized it, abundant love FOR somebody was as necessary to her as water running up the stems of flowers, abundant love FROM somebody as needful as sunshine on their petals.[21]

Indeed, on learning that Major Winton is her father, her reaction is one of pain that he loves her for her resemblance to her mother and not for herself alone.

In her early twenties Gyp marries Gustav Fiorsen, a violinist of great talent. The marriage fails; Gyp finds she cannot love her husband, and in the knowledge of this he deteriorates. Finally, fearing that in his jealousy of her

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[21] John Galsworthy, Beyond (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) p. 22.

he may harm their baby daughter, she leaves him. Not long afterwards she finds her true mate, Bryan Summerhay. They have several years of happiness together, but Gyp is over-alert for any sign that it may end. When Bryan conceives a passing fancy for a girl cousin, she is upset almost to the point of unbalance, although he offers to break off acquaintance with the girl. In the midst of a situation full of all sorts of potential tragedy, Bryan is killed in a riding accident. The coda to the story is rather inadequate, but contains the implication that Gyp's little girl has inherited the same capacity for giving love "beyond measure--beyond death."[22]

Beyond is Galsworthy's first attempt to present the greater part of his story from a woman's viewpoint. It is not very successful. Virginia Woolf was not until twelve years later to write that Mr. Galsworthy had not a spark of the woman in him; but Mr. Galsworthy himself must have thought the same thing many a time while he was writing Beyond. He gives the impression of standing rather awkwardly on his toes trying to peer in through the window of a strange house and report what he sees.

His sight, in itself, was good enough. For example:

> When a girl first sits opposite the man she has married, of what does she think? Not of the issues and emotions that lie in wait. They are too

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[22] Ibid., p. 498.

> overwhelming; she would avoid them while she can. Gyp thought of her frock ...[23]

She probably did. A girl just married, not quite sure in the depths of her if she loves her husband, subconsciously dreading the approaching night, would set her mind veering to her frock, her living-room furniture, the first dinner on the night they come back home--something like that. But the first question in the paragraph is that of a man wondering, openly confessing--as a good author should never do--that he isn't quite sure. Can anyone imagine the response a woman novelist would get if she wrote:

"When a man first sits opposite the girl he has married, of what does he think?"

Many times in Beyond, Galsworthy portrays Gyp's feelings with real insight and sensitivity. But the attempt, as illustrated above, is too obvious. In trying to show that Gyp, given her nature, would therefore feel, think, and do thus and so, he makes her a bundle of feelings instead of a woman. She loses outline. He describes her many times--her "fatal" dark eyes, her walk, her color, her grace in dancing--but the reader never gets the sense that she is someone real, who does what she must do because she is herself and no one else.

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[23] Ibid., p. 79.

She is an ideal, like Irene and Olive and Audrey. Galsworthy tries to make her more human and fallible; he gives her a capacity for unreasonable jealousy. But she is the only one of the four who has any provocation. And Galsworthy actually cannot quite make up his mind whether her jealousy is reasonable or not. At one point he says the fact of Bryan's giving a moment's thought to another woman was enough to spoil their relationship for her; at another, he says that she could easily forgive a temporary lapse, but that she fears Diana's advantageous position in society may enable her to capture Bryan for good--surely a reasonable cause for worry.

In connection with Gyp, Galsworthy makes out his strongest case for the quality of passivity:

> Her [Gyp's] very passivity was her strength, the secret of her magnetism. In her, he [Fiorsen] felt some of that mysterious sentiency of nature, which, even in yielding to men's fervors, lies apart with a faint smile--the uncapturable smile of the woods and fields by day or night, that makes one ache with longing. He felt in her some of the unfathomable, soft, vibrating indifference of the flowers and trees and streams, of the rocks, of bird-songs, and the eternal hum, under sunshine or starshine. Her dark, half-smiling eyes enticed him, inspired an unquenchable thirst.[24]

So, in these four women, Galsworthy's ideal is embodied --an ideal not so much of character as of charm; one to observe and desire rather than to emulate.

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[24] Ibid., p. 135.

3. Opinions Regarding Irene

~~Due to the fact that~~ Because The Forsyte Saga is at the present time more often read than any other of Galsworthy's novels, Irene is familiar to many readers unaware that Galsworthy created anybody else like her. She is the prototype of his passive, idealized heroines. Whether she is a popular one is open to question. Although she was so carefully designed to appeal to the senses and sympathies of the opposite sex, the enthusiasm of male reviewers for her is qualified. They find her alluring, but puzzling. Richard Curle writes, in a review of The Man of Property:

> Her character is (with the possible exception of Bianca Dallison's) the most enigmatic in the writings of Mr. Galsworthy, that mixture of the gentle and the passionate which is so arresting. Her husband ... is ... almost pitiable as mate to this charming and incomprehensible woman.... of these two figures, the woman is at heart more intractable than the man, more unforgiving, more dangerous. Irene is almost Russian in her ABANDON and her indecision.[25]

Henry Charles Duffin feels that her unhappy past did not justify the sacrifice of Jon's and Fleur's happiness.

> And the dreadful thing is that through out it is Irene who insists. She, so passive, so pliant, is strong alone in this.[26]

Among woman readers, there exists a tendency to positive resentment against Irene. The causes for this take a little

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[25] Richard Curle, "John Galsworthy," The Bookman (London), XLV (1913), 91-97.

[26] Henry Charles Duffin, "The Rehabilitation of Soames Forsyte," Cornhill Magazine, LXVIII (1930), 397-406.

searching out. One reason is that they, like Mr. Duffin, feel that she was unduly selfish in breaking up the attachment between Jon and Fleur. Galsworthy, as he explains in his preface to the Saga, was attempting to show that the strength of sex antagonism is something beyond reason; that Irene was the victim of her own emotions, and that the facts of her story were what decided Jon, not any arguments of her own. But most readers find it hard to understand--however clear it may have been to Galsworthy--how such an antagonism, in retrospect, could be so powerful as to justify the destruction of two young people's happiness.

Then, Galsworthy's presentation of Irene only through the consciousness of other characters makes it impossible for readers to get her feelings at first hand. In view of his later semi-failure with Gyp, it is probably just as well that he didn't try, at this earlier stage of his career, to see things with Irene's eyes. He wrote to Edward Garnett, who was criticizing the manuscript of The Man of Property for him, that he felt unequal to treating Bosinney subjectively, that he lacked "power enough over him or insight enough into him."[27] Very probably he felt this even more strongly in Irene's case. But the objective view of her makes Soames' feelings all the more vivid by comparison.

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[27] H. V. Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1935) p. 168.

Most women have felt at one time or another the "pangs of dispriz'd love." Probably none of them would care to be married to Soames Forsyte, or feel that they could make him a more sympathetic wife than did Irene, but the moving portrayal of his suffering arouses their pity and comprehension. When he lays his torn feelings bare before Irene, and cries out, "... you meet me with 'nerves,' and silence, and sighs,"[28] one cannot help finding his feelings somewhat justified. Galsworthy doesn't let Irene do much but sigh in return. There is a temptation to marshall the arguments one thinks she should have given; to invent kind, tactful explanations, replete with modern psychology, of WHY she can't love him, and at least leave him feeling better. The reader forgets that Irene--and Galsworthy--were products of the Victorian age, when the phraseology of psychology texts was not at the tip of everybody's tongue. Confronted, actually, with a similar situation, probably few modern women would do better.

Then again: Galsworthy implies that Irene's beauty makes her a special case. This arouses something in a woman akin to personal envy--or if that is over-strong, at least resentment. This is rather a rare sensation for a reader to have about a fictional character; the author is usually able to arouse a feeling of identification to prevent it. Gals-

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[28] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. 482.

worthy's second-hand impression of Irene interferes with this identification; girls and women see her as June and Fleur do--in both cases, she is an all-too-effective obstacle to their happiness.

Young Jolyon muses, "If she were plain I shouldn't be thinking twice about it. Beauty is the devil, when you're sensitive to it!"[29] This sets Irene apart from her sisters, any one of whom would be moved, as June was, by a first-hand knowledge of such a case as hers. Most women wish they could be more attractive than they are; most would like to feel that under similar circumstances they would merit the affection and concern given Irene by all the Jolyon Forsytes. "Beauty is the devil, when you're sensitive to it." Jolyon is a very likeable character, but his chivalry is cut in half by this statement. Galsworthy wanted to stress the power of beauty over men; perhaps he could better have stressed the fact that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and made every woman feel herself a potential Irene in the eyes of the right men. In effect, he says to the woman reader, "This isn't YOU." And Irene becomes the rival, not the vicarious self.

Some time after Beyond was published, in 1917, Henry Charles Duffin wrote, in a criticism of Galsworthy that Marrot quotes:

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[29] Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 460.

> ... I am always malcontented by his women: Irene of A Man of Property, Audrey of The Patrician, the heroine of The Fugitive, the heroine of Beyond. All these women appear weak in their loveliness; Mr. Galsworthy seems to see woman as such wretched prey, so helpless before men.... his heroines are always tossed by fate, broken, used. And the heroine of a novelist always represents Woman to that novelist.[30]

Perhaps Galsworthy felt this criticism. Perhaps his comparative failure with Gyp made him feel that he had "written himself out" with this type of woman. At any rate, he created no new heroines along these lines. Irene's story he continued, as has been described, in the novels which completed The Forsyte Saga. But the Irene of Indian Summer of a Forsyte, In Chancery, and Awakening is more of a dream, more of an ideal, and less of a real woman than the Irene of The Man of Property. And in To Let she ceases to hold the center of the stage. Another sort of heroine was born in To Let (or, to be literal, at the end of In Chancery); one who captured the mind of her readers and her author as well, who was to hold their interest for three novels more--that feminine juvenile lead par excellence on Galsworthy's fictional stage, Fleur Forsyte Mont.

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[30] Marrot, op. cit., p. 466.

Chapter IV.

FLEUR FORSYTE MONT--THE REALITY

1. Fleur

Late in 1921, Galsworthy wrote to a friend who had expressed his appreciation of The Forsyte Saga:

> Though the Saga is finished--the old Forsytes all gone--and the long duel over, I feel that I haven't done with Fleur; and am trying to gather force to pursue her in the world of today and tomorrow.[1]

In 1924 appeared The White Monkey, first volume of the second Forsyte trilogy, A Modern Comedy. Fleur Forsyte had run away with her creator.

In order to continue the Forsyte feud into the third generation, Galsworthy brought into being Jon, son of Irene and Jolyon, and Fleur, daughter of Annette and Soames. The reader can imagine his exercising some care to determine just what sort of children these two Forsyte couples would have; how the son of Irene and the daughter of Soames could love one another sincerely, and at the same time inherit those traits from their parents that had made for such deep-rooted antagonism in the past.

To Jon: the charm and gentleness of Irene: the firmness and idealism of Jolyon; their mutually shared capacity for

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[1] H. V. Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1935) p. 510.

devotion; his own generosity and boyish shyness.

To Fleur: the beauty and quick intelligence of her French mother; the possessiveness and tenacity of Soames; the normal selfishness of a spoiled only child; and the self-possession of a pretty teen-ager (at least, one of Galsworthy's).

Into these ingredients were fused the spark of genius. Fleur and Jon came alive. They were their parents' children, very lovely children too; but they were above all themselves.

Galsworthy, renowned as a satirist of society, has a way with his young lovers. There are exquisite love-scenes in many of his novels--between Nedda and Derek in The Freelands, Mark and Sylvia in The Dark Flower, Noel and Cyril in Saint's Progress. But the chase of Fleur by Jon in Holly Dartie's apple-orchard, and their early morning walk over the downs together, are perhaps the loveliest of them all. Perhaps this is all the more true because the difference between them is so strongly emphasized with every word and look and gesture. Nedda could lose herself in Derek; Cyril could lose himself in Noel; Mark's Sylvia will always be the little girl trailing after the big boy. But Fleur and Jon are always Fleur and Jon, each with a certain Forsyte stubbornness guarding his individuality, whatever the pull of the other's attraction.

At the end of the Saga, when Jon has sent word to Fleur that he must give her up, Fleur marries a devoted suitor, Michael Mont. The three novels comprising A Modern Comedy--The White Monkey, The Silver Spoon, and Swan Song--tell the story of their early married life, against the background of the 1920's.

Michael appears in the Saga as a rather scatter-brained post-war youth, but in the Comedy he proves to be one of the most thoroughly good young men in current fiction. Devoted to Fleur, knowing she does not love him, he combines perfect candor about his feelings and great tenderness for his wife with an infectiously puckish humor. Fleur knows his worth, but she cannot leave off regretting the loss of Jon. The marriage has rough going at times, and there are crises. But the bond between the pair steadily strengthens. Only after seven years comes the near-shipwreck, when Jon, now married, returns to England, and Fleur's passion for him revives. She finally starts a definite pursuit of him, determined to snatch at least an interlude of happiness from the past. At the crucial moment he yields, but in the end leaves her again. Fleur's whole future is perhaps saved at this juncture by the self-sacrificing death of her father, Soames. In the stronger emotions of grief and remorse, her passion for Jon finally dies, and she is able to accept her life as it is and make a good thing of it.

2. Predecessors of Fleur

Fleur, vivid and individual though she is, has her predecessors among the women and girls in Galsworthy's novels. None of them are so complex, so fully developed as she; nor is the "family resemblance" nearly so strong as that between Irene and the other women discussed in Chapter III. In fact, there is often very little resemblance. But Fleur has a definite place in the line of Galsworthy's young girls, and also of his more active, positive older women.

As distinguished from Irene, these heroines are active rather than passive--in fact, often show more initiative than their lovers. Among the younger ones--the teen-agers, like Thyme Dallison, Nedda Freeland, Nell Dromore and Noel Pierson --there is the aura of youth and ingenuousness which the idealized women do not have, not even the young Gyp. In more or less degree they have a touch of wilfulness. Invariably lovely, they are yet not dreams--though perhaps they may have incarnated the author's idea of a daughter. They often have very devoted fathers.

The first of these girls--if we except the young June Forsyte--is Thyme Dallison in Fraternity. She is seventeen, attractive, eager, full of youthful impatience with her elders and their society--the "modern" girl of 1909. Unlike Fleur, she is idealistic, at least for the moment; she wants to do something for the unfortunate. This is partly due to

the influence of her cousin Martin Stone, a young doctor, who believes Hygiene is the answer--or at least one definite answer--to the problem of Poverty. The friendship between him and Thyme--hovering on the brink of love, though the reader is never told whether it falls over or not--has a startlingly natural ring to those accustomed to romance in the 1940's. They are on familiar, quarrelsome terms, probably due to having known each other so long. Martin orders her about in a curt, Gary Cooper fashion; and though she is high-spirited and can hold her own, she admires him and takes it. To show she can live up to her standards--and to stand well with Martin--she joins his other social worker friends who live in the slums. But her youth, sensitivity, and breeding betray her. She finds she cannot stomach the life, and returns to her comfortable home.

Thyme is a part of the novel Fraternity, and represents one element of the society to which Galsworthy was holding up a mirror--with all its fine theories about the poor, and its unwillingness or inability to put them into practice. But Galsworthy, one feels, had a definite affection for the girl as a personality, though he gently needles her new ideas and her independence, as he does most of the habits of the current modern youth. She is a young girl, for one thing; and in this book Galsworthy shows himself interested in the psychology of young girls.

> A young girl's mind is like a wood in Spring--now a rising mist of bluebells and flakes of dappled sunlight; now a world of still, wan, tender saplings, weeping they know not why. Through the curling twigs of boughs just green, its wings fly towards the stars; but the next moment they have drooped to mope beneath the damp bushes. It is ever yearning for and trembling at the future; in its secret places all the countless shapes of things that are to be are taking stealthy council of how to grow up without letting their gown of mystery fall. They rustle, whisper, shriek suddenly, and as suddenly fall into a delicious silence. From the first hazel-bush to the last may-tree it is an unending meeting-;lace of young solemn things eager to find out what they are, eager to rush forth to greet the kisses of the wind and sun, and for ever trembling back and hiding their faces. The spirit of that wood seems to lie with her ear close to the ground, a pale petal of a hand curved like a shell behind it, listening for the whisper of her own life. There she lies, white and supple, with dewy, wistful eyes, sighing; "What is my meaning? Ah, I am everything! Is there in all the world a thing so womderful as I? ... Oh, I am nothing--my wings are heavy; I faint, I die!"[2]

This is a poetic paragraph; and perhaps the difference between poetry and prose is that prose seeks to record a reality, and poetry to find words for a mystery. Yet, in Thyme, there is a germ of realism that is never in Irene, for instance.

In The Dark Flower there are two girls, Sylvia Doone, who is only sixteen when we first meet her, and Nell Dromore, who at eighteen attracts the mature Mark Lennan. Sylvia is about as different from Fleur as can be imagined; timid, gentle, soft, with her lips always a little parted, she is just the sort of girl certain nineteenth-century novelists

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[2] John Galsworthy, Fraternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909) p. 328.

used to bid their readers admire. She could be considered one of the passive, idealized women, except that she is not idealized. Galsworthy is very well aware of the deficiencies of such a personality. The reader cannot feel for her anything even as warm as the protective, tolerant affection Mark had; and because of this he may not realize the deftness with which the author created her.

This is Sylvia in middle life, when she has been Mark's wife for fifteen years:

> Sylvia came in, bringing a freshly-opened flask of eau-de-Cologne. She was always bringing him something--never was anyone so sweet in those ways. In that grey, low-cut frock, her white, still prettiness and pale-gold hair, so little touched by Time, only just fell short of real beauty for lack of a spice of depth and of incisiveness, just as her spirit lacked he knew not what of poignancy. He would not for the world have let her know that he ever felt that lack. If a man could not hide little rifts in the lute from one so good and humble and affectionate, he was not fit to live.[3]

But, as with Thackeray's more favored Amelia, Sylvia's weakness is her strength. She captures Mark's affection, when he is eighteen and she sixteen, from the vivid, intense Anna Stormer, the Austrian wife of his tutor. Anna, not too happy in her marriage, is in love with the boy, eighteen years younger than herself. He in turn admires her ardently, but just at the critical moment he is caught away from her into the proximity of Sylvia. Youth's call to youth, and

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[3] John Galsworthy, The Dark Flower (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913) p. 240.

the appeal of her sensitive softness, arouse all the boyish chivalry in him. Even when he sees Anna ggain, he finds he cannot feel the same way about her; and she senses this and withdraws.

The story is repeated in reverse many years later. After the tragic end of his love-affair with Olive, Mark meets Sylvia again and marries her. They have a quiet, harmonious life together, till young Nell Dromore, daughter of Mark's old school-mate, crosses their pathway. She is motherless, a half-sophisticated, half-naive child, seemingly "brimful of affections that had no outlet."[4] These affections center on Mark, who is old enough to be her father. Quite candidly she offers herself to him. He, in his "dangerous years", is strongly attracted in turn, seeing in her a renewal of the youth that is slipping away from him. But Sylvia guesses what is in the wind, and in the face of her unprotesting grief Mark finds that he cannot go on with the affair. So, again, the softer, more dependent woman triumphs.

Nell is far more like Fleur than is Sylvia. There is, to be sure, about her a little of the feminine mystery Galsworthy attributes to his idealized heroines; like Irene, she is seen only through other eyes, Mark's to be exact. But she has plenty of vitality. Her combination of worldly poise and ingenuousness are a little like Fleur's; but she has a child-

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[4] Ibid., p. 247.

like frankness very different from Fleur's sophistication, and is affectionate where Fleur is a little hard. She is throughout the pursuer of Mark. Her wilfulness--and she has plenty--is wilder. When she and Mark go riding together, she leads him a mad chase, cuts at his hand with her whip when he almost catches her, finally gets herself thrown and gives him a scare. Then, when he sees she is not hurt, she appeals to him:

> "Don't be cross with me. I thought at first I'd pull up, but then I thought: If I jump he can't help being nice--so I did--Don't leave off loving me because I'm not hurt, please."[5]

Perhaps the most sympathetic of the younger women is Nedda Freeland, her cousin Derek's "little dark angel." Although her father, Felix, is the real protagonist of The Freelands, Galsworthy lets Nedda express herself very freely. In her journal, and her conversations with her father, the reader sees the growth of her love for Derek, her hope that she may find in herself the strength to be his partner and helpmate. Derek is part Scot, with a Highlander's fire and idealism, trained from childhood to be aware of social injustices. When he tries to lead neighborhood tenant farmers in rebellion against their landlord, Nedda has to stand the acid test; she never falters; and in the end she knows she can face anything with Derek and be the comforter he needs.

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[5] Ibid., p. 279.

Nedda is perhaps more closely allied with Galsworthy's "ideal" women than the other girls discussed here; she has some of their softness and other-world glamour, their "all-for-love" quality. But she is more real and more appealing. There is a kind of young radiance about her, an exuberance in her zest for life and in the way she gives her whole soul to her first love. And she is not passive. Without Fleur's or Nell's wilfulness, or Thyme's impatience with her elders, she can be softly, quietly determined. Her father, not too happy about her prospective future with Derek, knows better than to oppose her. Nedda, like Thyme, wants to do the things that will help and please her lover, and she is more successful--partly because she does not over-estimate her capacities, partly because she is more loving.

> I don't like fighting, but if I'm not ready to, he'll stop loving me, perhaps. I've got to learn. O Darkness out there, help me! And Stars, help me! O God, make me brave, and I will believe in you forever! If you are the spirit that grows in things in spite of everything, until they're like the flowers, so perfect that we laugh and sing at their beauty, grow in me too; make me beautiful and brave; then I shall be fit for him, alive or dead: and that's all I want.[6]

Though Nedda's feelings are almost entirely those of a girl in love, Galsworthy has progressed in depicting them. She is not so much of a mystery to him as Thyme was, or Nell. The strange thing is that in Beyond, published two years

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[6] John Galsworthy, The Freelands (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915) p. 94.

wish, he suffers from the social consequences and finally gives up his parish. Later Jimmy Fort, a man in his late thirties, wishes to marry Noel. Her father again refuses, this time because Fort has been carrying on an affair with Leila Lynch, a widow of his own age and a cousin of the Piersons. Pierson considers Fort bound to her. However, Leila moves out of the picture, and Noel marries Fort and is happy.

Noel cannot be called a spoiled child. Her wilfulness is impulsive, rather than calculated. She deeply loves her father, and is full of remorse at making him unhappy. Moreover, in her determination to snatch happiness while she can in spite of him, she undoubtedly has justice on her side. To one acquainted with the postwar generation and the feverishness of World War II, Noel's conduct with a boy she genuinely loved and feared to lose does not seem very shocking. However, considering that her upbringing had been that of immediate post-Victorian society, it must needs have taken more than ordinary force of will and desperation for her to take the drastic step. In this respect she is reminiscent of Fleur determined to "make sure of " Jon. Like Fleur, too, she is the initiator. Cyril is as deeply in love; he has perhaps even more telling arguments to marshall in favor of the marriage. But he would never have taken advantage of Noel. It is for her to lead him into the moonlit Abbey courtyard, and she does.

In Noel's wilfulness and initiative, she foreshadows Fleur. Up to a point, she is "modern" youth breaking out of the Victorian chrysalis. But she expresses few ideas on life in general. Though created ten years later, she now seems less modern than Thyme.

Fleur as a young married woman has no real predecessor. Comparisons might be drawn between her and the more active and strong-minded of Galsworthy's mature women--Bianca Dallison, Anna Stormer, and Leila Lynch. But none of them have personalities very much like Fleur's.

The story of Bianca--one of Galsworthy's few talented women--is that of a married couple drifting apart because of a deep-rooted incompatibility of temperament. There is no repulsion, as in The Forsyte Saga; in fact, part of Bianca's tragedy is that she is still drawn to her husband even while knowing that real love between them is gone past hope. She has the spirit to take action, but her inner conviction halts her. Emotional but proud, she is made for tragedy. Fleur is not. They seem such worlds apart in conception that it is hard to believe the same author created them.

Anna Stormer and Leila Lynch both have the problem of holding their lovers against younger competition; and both fail. The tragedy of a woman who feels age stealing away her charm while she still is young enough in spirit to want love is one to which Galsworthy is very sensitive. Leila, the older rival of Noel, is developed with more skill and res-

traint than Anna, who tends to lose outline and become a bundle of emotions, like Gyp. Galsworthy puts into Leila's mind some poignant words on the subject:

> You were young, you were beautiful, you still have beauty, you are not, cannot be, old. Cling to youth, cling to beauty; take all you can get, before your face gets lined and your hair grey; it is impossible that you have been loved for the last time.[8]

Of the three women, Leila is the most like Fleur. She has been disillusioned by a life full of experience, and has no false notions about her position with Jimmy or the relative intensity of their feelings for each other. Something of the mature Fleur's keen, rather cynical insight is in her also. She can accept the inevitable, once she recognizes it as inevitable, though whether she ever finds the redemption that Fleur does is doubtful.

3. The Appeal of Fleur

Trying to analyze Fleur's peculiar appeal is about as satisfactory as trying to describe a flower's charm by botanical dissection. She is certainly the most memorable of Galsworthy's fictional heroines, one of the most memorable anywhere in English fiction. A few reasons for Galsworthy's achievement can be given here, but in the end the mystery remains as deep as any mystery of real-life personality.

In the first place, Fleur is the most complex of all

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[8] Ibid., p. 126.

Galsworthy's woman characters. Love is as important to her as it is to any of them, but it is not her whole life, and probably would not have been even if she had married Jon. Without any outstanding creative talent, or any tendency to introspection or altruism, she still has a nature that demands activity and self-expression. Even her children--and she loves them very much--fill only a small corner of her life. There is something besides mere restlessness in the energy with which she decorates her home, keeps up with current fads, and enters into social life as a hostess. Galsworthy makes a frequent jibe at the Forsyte "collecting" spirit in her; she collects celebrities--literary ones when Michael is in the publishing business, political ones when he goes into Parliament--much as her father collects pictures, and her cousin June "lame ducks". We know, as Michael knows, that she is amusing herself as well as helping his career. But, given Fleur's nature, I don't think either the author or Michael had much to complain of about the way the girl spent her time.

Her reasons for doing things, and her reactions, are always very much her own. For instance, her feeling about the sea indicates a basic matter-of-factness uncongenial to poetry and natural beauty:

> There were few things with which she had less patience than the sea. It was not in her blood. The sea, with its reputation for never being in the same mood, blue, wet, unceasing, had for her a distressing sameness.[9]

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9 John Galsworthy, A Modern Comedy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) p. 686.

(Her father, incidentally, feels quite differently.) And how very much like her it is to take part in social work, and canteen work, not for altruistic reasons, but because she doesn't want to play second fiddle to anything in her husband's life! And with characteristic efficiency, she makes a good job of them.

Fleur develops, too, in a natural manner. The Fleur of A Modern Comedy is not quite the Fleur of the Saga, and the Fleur of End of the Chapter is something else again. None of Galsworthy's other heroines change very much, except perhaps June on a smaller and simpler scale. The differences are so subtle one can hardly name them. Only when one has read through the Comedy and gone back to the Saga can he see how young Fleur is there by comparison; a girl full of school slang and catch-words, like "swift", who beguiles Jon by her vivacity and poise, her sureness that she knows just what to do if he'll only leave it to her. And then her child-likeness breaks through; her blunt candor by the river when they find they don't think alike about life; her sudden tears when she has failed to persuade Jon to run away with her. Two years later, married, she is a little older, a little more really sophisticated, able to say the right things to the right people, to keep an importunate suitor at just the proper distance till she knows what to do with him. Her later revived passion for Jon is that of an adult. Yet one feels a sense of continuity. Fleur WOULD become just like that!

For another thing, Galsworthy presents about one third of the Comedy from Fleur's viewpoint, and it is as skillfully depicted as that of Soames or Michael. He has looked through the eyes of his woman characters before, but his range has always been limited. Margery Pendyce is all mother; Gyp Winton, who has a whole book to express herself in, is throughout the love-conscious woman. Fleur is many things.

Galsworthy takes his own time to get his bearings with her. In the Saga we see her with the eyes of her father, then with the eyes of Jon. He first lets us into her mind by means of a letter she writes a girl friend (a method like the journals of Nedda and Thyme).

"I believe I'm in love,"[10] she begins. The directness is Fleur's; and by making her first words about love--the one and only love--we know her for the brain-child of her creator.

Galsworthy is at first much more at home in Jon's mind. He lets Jon do most of the dreaming. He is still wondering just how Soames' and Annette's daughter would feel when he watches Fleur brooding by the river, thinking of Jon in Spain.

> And she took out Jon's letters ... Fleur was not sentimental, her desires were ever concrete and concentrated, but what poetry there was in the daughter of Soames and Annette had certainly in those weeks of waiting gathered round her memories of Jon. They all belonged to grass and blossom, flowers and running water. She enjoyed him in the scents absorbed by her crinkling nose. The stars

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[10] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. 723.

> could persuade her that she was standing beside him in the centre of the map of Spain; and of an early morning the dewy cobwebs, the hazy sparkle and promise of the day down in the garden, were Jon personified to her.[11]

Then we see Fleur after the shadow has fallen, wondering what she must do. Not for her any fatalistic waiting for things to take their course! Jon has inherited a little of his mother's passivity; Fleur must force the action. Without telling Jon that she has learned the truth about the "family feud", she urges him to elope with her. She fails, as she was to fail again years later, because, with all her clear-sightedness, she miscalculates on a part of Jon's nature foreign to her own. After the interview, she goes away in a confusion of anger, disappointment, and concern about Jon. "She had stirred Jon up so fearfully, yet nothing definite was promised or arranged!"[12]

Her later disappointment Galsworthy lets her express in conversation. But when The Comedy begins, she plays her part from the first as one of the protagonists. In Swan Song, the the ebb and flow of her emotions regarding Jon have the quality of summer fever. And finally, as she sits by her father in his last hours, how inevitable, after all that has happened, that her passion should be quite burned away: "Jon was remote from her in that room darkened by sun blinds and her remorse."[13]

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[11] Ibid., p. 775.
[12] Ibid., p. 823.
[13] Galsworthy, A Modern Comedy, p. 789.

Fleur's qualities can be lined up, pro and con; there remains to be explained why she is lovable. For lovable she certainly is. In the books there is not much evidence as to whether women liked her or not; men certainly found it easy to love and forgive her. But most of the women she encounters have some reason for prejudice. Jon's two sisters, June and Holly, both disapprove of her in theory; in practice both take an interest in her and side with her. She seems to have plenty of school friends. And Dinny certainly admires her cousin-by-marriage. The only women, indeed, who definitly dislike her are a group of society cats, Marjorie Ferrar and her friends.

To women readers, as well as men, Fleur endears herself, though there are perhaps those who do not realize it. Some probably feel that they ought not to like her; that they are not meant to. But she holds their interest, and probably their partiality. The researcher confesses to a decided predilection for her; the sort of feeling many people in real life inspire, often people who are a little self-centered. However one may disapprove of them, they attract; their friends would do a great deal more for them than for some of their more admirable and unselfish acquaintances. Fleur is, of course, charming; her vivacity, wit, and self-possession must have made her popular at school. Edward Wagenknecht speaks of her keen insight into her own nature,

and her "endearing childlikeness;"[14] H. C. Duffin says her redeeming feature is her "genius for atonement."[15] There is something about Fleur that makes one long to protect her from the consequences of her misdeeds; something that Michael feels when, shortly before Kit is to be born, she clings to him during a thunderstorm, murmuring, "If I come through, I'm going to be quite different to you, Michael."[16]

4. What Fleur Represents

It is always easy to attach symbolism to Galsworthy's characters. He never quite gets over his early tendency to make them represent something. Fleur has her own significance: she is a Forsyte, and in her manner she personifies the Forsyte possessive spirit. "We think she's got rather a 'having' nature,"[17] says Holly; and Irene tells her son, "You are a giver, Jon; she is a taker."[18] In the Comedy, she "collects" people, society lions of sorts. The charge of "snob" brought against her by Marjorie Ferrar is a misnomer;

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[14] Edward Wagenknecht, "Pity, Irony, and John Galsworthy," Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943) p. 481.

[15] Henry Charles Duffin, "The Rehabilitation of Soames Forsyte," Cornhill Magazine, LXVIII (1930), 397-406.

[16] Galsworthy, A Modern Comedy, p. 222.

[17] Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga, p. 834.

[18] Ibid., p. 883.

Fleur shows little interest in position; she is totally indifferent to the title Michael will inherit. Her interest is rather, Galsworthy implies, a sort of collector's fever. She confesses a desire for prestige and admiration, but she would hardly be normal if she didn't desire them, especially with her qualifications.

It would not be amiss to say that she embodies the spirit of the post-war twentieth century, as Galsworthy saw it. He felt that the feverish restlessness of the 1920's, the preoccupation with pleasure, fads, and weird experimentation in the arts, resulted from a sense of being uprooted, a subconscious longing for spiritual standards and values. Fleur is restless and discontented in the midst of an outwardly pleasant life; she misses something. She believes that what she misses is Jon; and perhaps it is; her love for him might have given her life depth and purpose had they been married. Michael, though she keeps him on tenter-hooks much of the time, is actually happier, for he loves her; indeed, his marriage to her plays a great part in making him the man he is. The prospect of a child steadies Fleur, makes her more contented with the world and with Michael. Her affection for Kit is never sentimentalized, but it does become a ballast, even in her fever over Jon.

But Galsworthy does not really merit the many charges made in his early career that he is a novelist of ideas and not of character. Rather the creator of character overpowers

the man of ideas; he never sacrifices the integrity of a character to make it consistent with a symbol. Least of all with Fleur. While she and Michael listen dutifully to a "modern" concert featuring music devoid of any harmonic principle, Galsworthy confesses that Fleur doesn't really enjoy it, for she has a natural sense of rhythm.[19] So she remains Fleur, and escapes absorption into the Spirit of 1920.

A Modern Comedy was completed before Virginia Woolf wrote A Room of One's Own. If her verdict in the case of Galsworthy may be questioned, I think it is in the character of Fleur; for its effortless spontaneity suggests that Galsworthy did, for once, lose himself in the identity of his heroine.

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[19] Ibid., p. 16.

Chapter V.

DINNY CHARWELL--THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

1. An Attempt to See "the Other Side"?

Mrs. Galsworthy, in her preface to the Memorial Edition of The Forsyte Saga, calls Dinny Charwell

> the most attractive of all the Galsworthy woman characters ... or so one must believe from numerous letters received from Far West and Far East, thanking the author for Dinny and entreating him to "make her happy"![1]

Dinny Charwell (sometimes spelled Cherrell, because that is the English pronunciation) is the last of Galsworthy's heroines. The three books in which she is the main character were written in the last years of his life; his death early in 1933 preceded the publication of Over the River. The road between Irene Forsyte and Dinny Charwell is a long and interesting one.

In my theory that Galsworthy was influenced by Mrs. Woolf's criticism in A Room of One's Own, Dinny is the main clue. For one thing, her story is the only one written by Galsworthy after the appearance of A Room of One's Own; so her personality is the only major one that could owe it anything directly. This is not to suggest that if he actually developed an "androgynous mind." that Mrs. Woolf's criticism,

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[1] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. viii.

if it was a factor, was the main one or the only one. As the previous chapter tried to demonstrate, Galsworthy showed much intuition in his development of Fleur's personality--far more than in that of her predecessors. In portraying Fleur he seemed to express something that was latent in him. Mrs. Woolf's thesis implied that the "single-sexed" mind is a product of an era and an environment, rather than necessarily inherent in a person. If this be true, Galsworthy must have had potentialities of another sort of mind.

The researcher has found no direct evidence that Galsworthy was impressed by Mrs. Woolf's opinion of him. But he could hardly have failed to read her book, or at least to have had it brought to his attention. Her verdict must have been a surprise to him. For Galsworthy certainly thought of himself as a feminist. He was interested in the legal emancipation of women; he supported the suffragist cause; and in his novels he portrayed women with sympathy, and more kindness on the whole than he did his man characters. The answer, of course, lies in Mrs. Woolf's definition of the "androgynous mind", already quoted in Chapter I:

> Coleridge certainly did not mean, when he said that a great mind is androgynous, that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women; a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretation. Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind. He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. In fact

> one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind, though it would be impossible to say what Shakespeare thought of women.[2]

Given Galsworthy's nature, his artistic integrity and breadth of mind, I doubt if he would have dismissed Mrs. Woolf's criticism in a cavalier manner. His pride might have been touched, and have kept him from saying anything; but I am inclined to think he would have done some inner self-searching, and that Dinny might have been the result.

For one thing, Dinny is Galsworthy's first real feminine protagonist. Other heroines have held the center of his stage at times; and despite the famous example of Irene, their viewpoints are often given. We see a good part of The Country House through the eyes of Margery Pendyce, much of The Patrician through those of Barbara Caradoc; Beyond is very largely Gyp's story (though more her father's than the author perhaps realized) and A Modern Comedy at least one-third Fleur's. But most of these women, even Fleur, are preoccupied with love in one or another of its aspects, or with very personal concerns. They are not the observers of life as a whole, the philosophers, as are Young Jolyon, Hilary Dallison, Lord Dennis Fitz-Harold, or Felix Freeland. Dinny, of all the women, comes nearest to being this.

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[2] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929) p. 171.

She does, to be sure, have a very conscious feminine slant. In her talk with the little shop-girl her uncle the curate has befriended, she hears the girl, bitter from experience with a man-governed Church and State, ask why God is called He; and she thinks: "The Creator was bisexual, or the whole process would have ended at the start. In that was a primal equality, which she had never before quite realised."[3]

Then, walking on, she reflects:

> ... her mood was that of one who has failed to go as far as she has wished. She had touched on the uncharted, and recoiled. Her thoughts and feelings were like the twittering of Spring birds who have not yet shaped out their songs. That girl had roused in her some queer desire to be at grips with Life, without supplying the slightest notion of how to do it. It would be a relief even to be in love.[4]

Dinny is as absorbed in love, when the time comes, as any of her predecessors. In fact, the "eggs in one basket" phrase, used so often in Gyp's case, is used in hers too. But Dinny has something in her besides passion, some inner resources that most of Galsworthy's heroines lack. The above reflections are not quite those of a college graduate (Dinny is twenty-four at this time), for college students are urged into speculation in their philosophy and psychology courses, and graduate at least thinking themselves experienced in mental exercise, though they may not have solved to their own

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[3] John Galsworthy, The End of the Chapter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931) p. 162.

[4] Ibid., p. 163.

satisfaction the mysteries on which Dinny ponders. They are fortunate, indeed, if they ever do. But Dinny's reflections are deeper and more specific than the vague longings of young Thyme and Nedda to know all about everything, or the longings of Fleur--who is not given to speculation--for some unknown substance she cannot find.

We are not shown that she has a wide range of interests or activities. Fleur certainly has more irons in the fire. Dinny's interests are usually connected with people she cares about, and her home. Lady Mont, her "Aunt Em" (Michael's mother), observes that Dinny would "make a good lady-in-waitin'--unselfish."[5] Dinny has a gift for absorbing herself in her friends' troubles, and while this may not be the same as a wide range of activities, it gives us a chance to see many sides of her, and to get slants on people and affairs that are typically hers.

Moreover, she inherits nothing from Galsworthy's passive heroines. His admiration for the quality of passivity may not be dead altogether--there is a beautiful and unfortunate wife, Diana Ferse, in Maid in Waiting, to whom her husband's death alone brings release--but it finds no more scope in Dinny that it did in Fleur. She is an extremely active young woman. When there is anything that can be done to help her brother, her sister, her friend Diana or her

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[5] Ibid., p. 132.

lover Wilfrid Desert, she finds out what it is and then goes ahead and does it. She has no belief in waiting for Fate to take its course.

2. Reasons for Dinny's Popularity

Dinny Charwell is a perfect lady. She is chaste and unselfish; she is capable of fainting, and does so once, though not under the standard Victorian circumstances; and she comes perilously close to dying of a broken heart.

And still she has a high rating with her audience.

The great popularity of Scarlett O'Hara and her followers does not indicate that readers in the 1930's and 1940's have been especially fond of "nice girls" in fiction. Dinny is thoroughly nice; and possibly many of Galsworthy's readers who feel that they ought not to like Fleur find her a relief. But Dinny has many saving graces that keep her from being too good to be true.

Sympathy is perhaps the mainspring of her nature; and that is an endearing trait in both literature and life. It is the character tool Galsworthy uses to present so much of the story through her eyes. If the troubles involve her friends, she is there standing by, and thinking her own thoughts about the matter.

Nor, for all she calls herself old-fashioned, is Dinny purdish or squeamish, though she may be shocked by cruelty or abnormality in any form. She is upset to learn that her

sister has married a sadist--anyone would be. She is just as candid in speech as Fleur. Her ideas on morality are neither those of the strictly conventional nor the anarchistic; she believes in the code of individual judgment. She says to the shop-girl, Millicent Pole, who has confessed to accosting a man because she needed money: "I think that kind of thing ought only to go with affection; but I expect I'm old-fashioned."[6] When she has fallen in love with Wilfrid Desert and become engaged to him, she quite calmly asks him: "Do you want me to be everything to you before you marry me? If so, I can."[7] (Wilfrid is willing to wait.)

Perhaps her main saving grace is letting her virtues sit lightly on her. Few of Galsworthy's heroines have a real sense of humor. Dinny is full of fun, and her conversations are lively. She has no trouble sizing herself up, though she is sometimes surprised at the high opinion others have of her. One of her suitors, a man of the British Navy, has asked to kiss her good-bye, and she consents.

> "Now," she thought, "is when they kiss you masterfully on the lips. He hasn't! He must almost respect me!" And she got up.
>
> "Come along, dear boy ... I really will try and become less virginal."[8]

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[6] Ibid., p. 159.

[7] Ibid., p. 410.

[8] Ibid., p. 327.

3. Predecessors of Dinny

If Dinny belongs with any particular group of Galsworthy's woman characters, it is probably with those who combine goodness with wisdom and clear-sighted practicality. There is something of Holly Forsyte about her; though we do not see a great deal of Jolyon's younger daughter, she has a wholesome, clear-eyed quality the reader finds as restful as Fleur did, although her critical attitude toward Fleur seems sometimes a little hard. But Holly's thoughts are naturally about the welfare of her brother Jon. Dinny has none of Kirsteen Freeland's dynamic idealism, but she has some of her spiritual independence and insight.

Perhaps the girl most like her is Barbara Caradoc. Barbara, younger sister of "the patrician", is a girl in her early twenties, vital, brave, with a sincere longing to know the real stuff of life outside the glass bell of aristocracy in which she has been reared. She is attracted to Charles Courtier, a leader among the radicals; but he does not feel that he can urge her to give up everything for him. In the end they are parted, and Barbara makes the best of a "rebound" marriage. Dinny, whose romance with Wilfrid Desert reaches a more advanced stage before coming to grief, eventually does the same. Although her wedding at the close of

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[illegible] p.

Over the River is a somewhat qualified happy ending, the chances are that she will come to love her excellent husband, and perhaps have a more contented life with him than she would have had coping forever with Wilfrid's moods.

4. What Dinny Represents

Does Dinny represent anything in particular to Galsworthy? Besides the feminine viewpoint, of which I have tried to give evidence, it may be that she represents England, as Galsworthy saw it in later life. For the author of End of the Chapter is not sitting in judgment on his class and his country, as was the author of The Man of Property, Fraternity, and The Freelands. After World War I, a change appeared in the one-time critic of English society. Perhaps this was due to having seen his country in the throes of war; perhaps to the flux and change of the post-war years. Galsworthy did not feel at home in the society of the 1920's, and the tone of his satire was different. In his Preface to The Forsyte Saga, he wrote:

> The persistence of the Past is one of those tragi-comic blessings which each new age denies, coming cock-sure on to the stage to mouth its claim to a perfect novelty. But no Age is so new as that: Human Nature, under its changing pretensions and clothes, is and ever will be very much of a Forsyte, and might, after all, be a much worse animal.[9]

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[9] Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga, p. xii.

Quite different, this, from a young man who, in a letter to his critic, could say, "We both hate the Forsytes and wish their destruction."[10]

In the early 1930's shadows of coming grim events were already falling on the British Empire, and on the whole world of its allies. The intensification of patriotism in such times is almost subconscious, but it occurs. Even earlier, Galsworthy has Michael say to Soames:

"Is there a country in the world where they stick it as they do here? I get awfully bucked at being English every now and then. Don't you?"[11]

In Maid in Waiting we find Dinny and her family concerned about the honor of the British Army; in Flowering Wilderness Dinny is moved, in spite of herself, by her father's argument that Wilfrid let the Empire down when he renounced his religion at the point of an Arab's pistol. She is loyal to her lover just the same, for his faults make no difference to her. In her own eyes, she is a representative of the England Wilfrid has never really known.

> The rain on her face, the sappy fragrance, the call of the cuckoos, and that state of tree when each has leaves in different stages of opening, freshened her body but brought a little ache to her heart.... Since babyhood she had been abroad but three times ... and had always come home more in

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[10] H. V. Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1935) p. 169.

[11] Galsworthy, A Modern Comedy, p. 207.

> love with England and Condaford than ever. Henceforth her path would lie she knew not where ... But surely Wilfrid would feel the charm of Condaford and not mind if they spent time there now and again....
>
> "For me to discover England to him," she thought; "for him to discover the East to me."[12]

Her uncle, Sir Lawrence, asks her to sit for a portrait as an example of the English type "Because ... you contain the answer to the riddle of the English lady, and I collect the essential difference between national cultures."[13]

So, in the end, perhaps the elusive spirit of Beauty did make its peace with Galsworthy's world. For his final personification of England is not Soames Forsyte, nor Horace Pendyce, but Dinny Charwell.

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[12] Galsworthy, End of the Chapter, p. 384.

[13] Ibid., p. 94.

Chapter VI.

CONCLUSION

1. General Characteristics of Galsworthy's Heroines

John Galsworthy's heroines bear their creator's stamp, as every author's characters do. In Shakespeare, to be sure, it would be hard to find a single trait that all his heroines have in common; but a student of Shakespeare could probably find the secret hall-mark; honesty or frankness, perhaps. With Galsworthy the problem is less complex.

For one thing, there is the simple range of their environment. All Galsworthy's main woman characters are English, and they all come from the upper strata of society. Galsworthy does not bring his heroines out of the slums, or from across the seas. There are women in his novels who originate outside his country and class, but they are subordinate in importance, with the possible exceptions of Anna Stormer, Anne Wilmot Forsyte, and the little model in Fraternity.

The universality of outstanding beauty among Galsworthy's heroines is notable. This might be taken for a tribute to womankind in general--and it might mean that Galsworthy noticed only the pretty ones. Irene represents the spirit of Beauty itself, but the others don't fall far behind her, as their author describes them. Barbara Caradoc

and Audrey Noel, Olive Cramier and Gyp Winton, Nedda Freeland and Noel Pierson--all are as lovely as the heroines of legendary romance. Fleur is a modern girl, disturbingly attractive. Dinny is never actually called beautiful--Galsworthy makes a point of giving her an imperfect nose, and compares her to "a flower on a long stalk that might easily be broken off, but never was."[1] But the reader can be in no doubt that he admires her appearance.

Not only are they beautiful, but they have charm, poise, and perfect self-possession. Galsworthy has never conceived of a woman who felt shy and awkward, unsure of her social appeal. He has never created a plain adolescent who must grow up to become attractive, or a woman who appeals to some and not to others, who can be lovely sometimes and ordinary at other times. Even shy little Sylvia is perfectly at ease with Mark. Of Gyp Winton he says: "Unlike most girls, she never had an epoch of awkward plainness, but grew like a flower, evenly, steadily."[2] At her first ball she appears with "a demeanour perfectly cool--as though she knew that light and movement, covetous looks, soft speeches, and admiration were her birthright."[3] Nell Dromore is at ease in the

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[1] John Galsworthy, End of the Chapter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) p. 12.

[2] John Galsworthy, Beyond (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) p. 19.

[3] Ibid., p. 23.

same way under the same circumstances. Fleur's self-possession is the perfect contrast to Jon's shyness. In the instance of a slightly more mature woman, Olive Cramier, at one of her meetings with Mark:

> Her breast was heaving a little, under her thin frock, but she was calmer than he, with that wonderful composure of pretty women in all the passages of love, as who should say: This is my native air![4]

Their social and moral standards, too, are all very similar. Galsworthy gives them all credit for a certain instinct regarding personal morality outside the accepted conventions; there is never any doubt in their minds as to whether a prospective step is right or wrong, but only whether it is wise. Generally, they conform to the code of Audrey Noel, as Galsworthy gives it in The Patrician:

> Life, and her clear way of looking at things, had rooted in her the conviction that to a woman the preciousness of her reputation was a fiction invented by men entirely for man's benefit; a second-hand fetish insidiously, inevitably set up by men for worship, in novels, plays, and law-courts. Her instinct told her that men could not feel secure in the possession of their women unless they could believe that women set tremendous store by sexual reputation. What they wanted to believe, that they did believe! But she knew otherwise. Such great-minded women as she had met or read of had always left on her the impression that reputation for them was a matter of the spirit, having little to do with sex. From her own feelings she knew that reputation, for a simple woman, meant to stand well in the eyes of him or her whom she loved best.[5]

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[4] John Galsworthy, The Dark Flower (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913) p. 170.

[5] John Galsworthy, The Patrician (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911) p. 129.

Variance in ideas of morality exists among the men, and the older women. The heroines let the truth of their feelings be their guide. Conflict in their minds regarding the consummation of their love is due to some outside influence. Audrey withdraws from Miltoun because their association may harm his career; Irene has some such concern in regard to Bosinney; Olive and Gyp are tormented--not too convincingly--by vague intuitive fears. But none, except Helen Bellew, are without conscience or scruple. Love must be real, and constancy must be complete. Fleur, the most "advanced" in ideas of sex conduct, cannot, when it comes to a point, hurt her husband for the sake of a man she loves no better. Her misadventure with Jon, however censorable in most respects, is not a casual intrigue, but the outcropping of an old and very real love. Fleur might have mastered her passion, to be sure; and she chose not to; but the passion was genuine.

For all these women, love is the prime and prevailing interest. Everything in their lives seems to lead up to or away from it; and in its absence they are as conscious of it as when it engulfs them. Love-affairs are important themes in all Galsworthy's novels. In A Modern Comedy, Fleur is not in love with her husband, as he is with her; but most of her career is an effort to forget Jon. And Dinny, even before she becomes involved with Wilfrid, is never allowed to forget about the prospect of romance and marriage. She hardly could, with love-affairs going on all around her.

Any other feminine activities, Galsworthy appears to feel, are mere distractions. There are no career women among his heroines. This is partly due, or course, to his own social background. Women of Galsworthy's class did not, in the time of his youth and manhood, have careers. And even later upper-class English society did not encourage them to do so. The girls in Galsworthy's novels who work for a living do so because they must. Daphne Wing is talented; but if Gyp had been equally talented she would never have done anything about it. She does have a flair for music, and composes some; but only as an amateur. Bianca Dallison paints, and seems to have real ability; but painting is a side-line to her marriage. She is primarily a woman with emotional problems, not an artist. (It is only fair to say that this is true of Galsworthy's talented men, also.)

Had the heroines of Galsworthy's fictional world lived in present-day America, for instance, their stories must, in many cases, have been quite different. Their problems have to do entirely with their emotions; they have no serious financial troubles; nor do they ever consider careers as alternatives to marriage. Irene is perhaps an exception; she has to teach music for a living after leaving Soames. Had this girl in moderate circumstances been trained for self-support, she might have avoided her unwelcome marriage and all subsequent troubles. But that would have been frowned upon in her girlhood; earning one's living, especially

if one were a woman, was a fate thrust upon one only by grim necessity. The idea does not seem to appall Irene as an alternative to living with Soames, but it would have been frowned upon by all the Forsytes, beyond a doubt.

Fleur, had she been an American, would probably have made a career for herself instead of marrying Michael, at least so soon after the break with Jon. The idea of her doing so occurs to Soames, and he shudders at it. But she would have made an admirable career woman; and so, in her erratic way, would June. It is incredible that some of the Forsyte women should not have shared the business acumen of their men. But Galsworthy's characters cannot be separated from their environment, however interesting it may be to speculate about them; it goes into their making, as it went into his.

2. Ideas and Characters

Galsworthy, early in his career, was frequently charged with making his characters always represent ideas. An article written in 1908 says:

> ... he possesses the power, to a very remarkable degree, of making the idea concrete in some individual or group of individuals. The characters in his novels are mostly types--national types.[6]

In 1913 Richard Curle wrote:

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[6] "The Vital Literary Art of John Galsworthy," Current Literature, XLV (1908), 408-410.

> The truth is, everybody in Mr. Galsworthy stands for an idea as well as for a human being, and though this may add to their value as characters in books written with a purpose (which in one sense or other of the word his books most decidedly are), it does detract from their air of actuality.[7]

And as late as 1919, F. G. Bettany said that in Saint's Progress Galsworthy was not out for telling a story so much as showing "the attitude of the whole of us, the community, as summed up in certain well-defined types, under war conditions...."[8]

Galsworthy himself, by the evidence of his letters, originally felt that he was primarily a social critic; but later the creation of character came to be of prime importance in itself, without reference to the type and attitude it represented. The permanence of his characters in the minds of his readers indicates that the creative artist finally triumphed; for characters in any way allegorical do not, as a rule, outlast the conditions that produce them. Whatever Galsworthy's characters may represent, they act like individuals; and in the ones he allows to change and develop with the years, like Soames and Fleur, he lets the idea go for the sake of the character. It is a temptation to read some symbolism into his personalities. We know he meant Irene to represent

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[7] Richard Curle, "John Galsworthy", Bookman (London) XLV (1913) pp. 91-17.

[8] F. G. Bettany, "Mr. Galsworthy's Saint," Bookman (London) LVII (1919), p. 121.

the spirit of universal beauty. By the same token, Nedda can be said to represent youth carrying on the fight for justice; Noel, sorrowing youth in wartime; Fleur, the "modern" generation; Dinny, England, and so on. This is an entertaining game, but it can be carried to extremes. Galsworthy's woman characters are real personalities. If the range of his vision was limited, still he was true to it.

3. Virginia Woolf's Criticism

Finally: In what respects does Galsworthy justify Virginia Woolf's criticism that he is an author with a "single-sexed" rather than an "androgynous" mind? Does he ever attain "that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself"?[9]

The test is again, as in the paragraph previously quoted, the mind not having

> any special sympathy with women; a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretation. Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind.... the androgynous mind is resonant and porous ... it transmits emotion without impediment; ... it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.[10]

That Galsworthy is an author very conscious of sex differences, there can be no doubt. He emphasizes them

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[9] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929) pp. 161-62.

[10] Ibid., p. 171.

throughout his novels. His very preoccupation with love, especially when he writes of women, is evidence. So also is his early unsureness when he came to handling a woman's emotions subjectively. Likewise, his tendency to idealize his heroines. A thing idealized is a thing not quite understood. And in idealizing women, Galsworthy does them a questionable service. It may be flattering to have one's representative always beautiful, charming, poised and single-hearted. But it shows no appreciation of one's real problems.

In his more emotional novels, for example, Galsworthy was apt to invoke the contrast between men and women in constancy. When Mark tries to explain to his wife Sylvia that his passion for Nell does not affect his feeling for Sylvia, but is just a pursuit of his lost youth, she says:

> "And do you think I don't want my youth back?"
>
> He stopped.
>
> For a woman to feel that her beauty--the brightness of her hair and eyes, the grace and suppleness of her limbs--were slipping from her and from the man she loved! Was anything more bitter?--or any more sacred duty than not to add to that bitterness. Not to push her with suffering into old age, but to help keep the star of her faith in her charm intact!
>
> Man and woman--they both wanted youth again; she, that she might give it all to him; he, because it would help him towards something--new! Just that world of difference![11]

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[11] John Galsworthy, The Dark Flower (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913) pp. 298-99.

In Beyond, Bryan has a similar justification for his flirtation with Diana:

> In the night, Gyp had said, "You are cruel. Do you think there is any man in the world that I wouldn't hate the sight of if I knew that to see him gave you a moment's pain?" It was true--he felt it was true. But you couldn't hate a girl simply because she loved you ... That was not reasonable, not possible. But did that difference between a man and a woman necessarily mean that Gyp loved him so much more than he loved her? Could she not see things in proportion? See that a man might want, did want, other friendships, even passing moments of passion, and yet could love her just the same?[12]

But it is on these very assumed differences that the double standard--of which Galsworthy disapproved--was founded. The circumstances of her life may make a woman single-hearted, but if she has the opportunity of seeing many men, she must acknowledge that her virtue of constancy lies in her will and not in her nature. For there is in every woman something of Margery Sharpe's rueful Julia, in The Nutmeg Tree, who enjoyed Fred's kiss just as much as if she wasn't engaged to Sir William (whom she adored) at all!

Galsworthy's men and women seldom meet on common ground outside the field of love. Community of interest is not over-important, though it is nice to have a mutual appreciation of music and art, and perhaps of dogs and horses. But when Gyp tries to build a marriage on the basis of a mutual love for

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[12] John Galsworthy, Beyond (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) pp. 472-73.

music, she fails. The call of the senses and the spirit springs from a deeper source.

Galsworthy's ideal woman was the woman of genius in love. He has a little contempt for the too-clever, capable woman. Thus, for instance, he interprets the energetic club-woman, the woman of "causes", personified in Mrs. MacAnder, whose nose for gossip brought on Irene's tragedy:

> At the MacAnder, like all London, Time pauses.
>
> .....
>
> With an air of being in at the death, she had an almost distressing power of taking care of herself. She had done more, perhaps, in her way than any woman about town to destroy the sense of chivalry which still clogs the wheel of civilization. So smart she was, and spoken of endearingly as "the little MacAnder!"
>
> .....
>
> If there was one thing more than another that she could not stand it was one of those soft women with what men called "charm" about them, and for Mrs. Soames she always had an especial dislike.
>
> Obscurely, no doubt, she felt that if charm were once admitted as the criterion, smartness and capability must go to the wall ...[13]

Galsworthy, no doubt, sympathized with Old Jolyon's feelings about women in general:

> He could not bear women who threw their shoulders and eyes at you, and chattered away; or hard-mouthed women who laid down the law and knew more than you did. There was only one quality in a woman that appealed to him--charm; and the quieter it was, the more he liked it.[14]

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[13] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. 234.

[14] Ibid., p. 324.

It is notable that in none of his "reform" novels does Galsworthy take up the cudgels for woman suffrage (except briefly in The Freelands) or for advanced feminine education or better working opportunities. He did lend practical support to the suffrage cause. But his main concern in the question of feminine emancipation was reforming the Divorce Laws and thereby giving women the opportunity to correct marital mistakes.

Young Jolyon tells Soames, when the latter is seeking to induce Irene to return to him:

> "I am what they call a 'feminist,' I believe ... I'm against any woman living with any man whom she definitely dislikes. It appears to me rotten."[15]

But of the wider implications of feminism--the search for equal opportunity to develop all one's talents and tastes, to become a full-fledged individual--Galsworthy seemed almost unaware.

Not that the championing of any of these causes by Galsworthy would have meant that he possessed an "androgynous mind", or was even on the way to developing one. But a recognition of other needs than those entirely related to love might indicate a greater breadth of understanding, a mind more "undivided."

However, the researcher cannot altogether agree with Mrs. Woolf's impression that Galsworthy had not "a spark of

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[15] Ibid., p. 545.

the woman" in him. Although so much of his observation of women was confined to love-interest, in that observation he showed a very great understanding. And there is something to a woman very congenial in his appreciation of natural beauty, his preoccupation with people and human relations, his compassion, his fastidiousness. These are traits often considered feminine.

If the above quotation from A Room of One's Own be used as a definition, it must be questioned whether the androgynous mind can be consciously developed. Such a mind must be born, not made--or else formed by such early influences that it would be hard to separate them from inherent qualities. Galsworthy could hardly make his mind "resonant and porous", if it were not so, in the few writing years remaining to him after Mrs. Woolf's book appeared. Granted that his early training, if not his nature, tended to separate him from women and make him sharply sex-conscious, to make his mind therefore "single-sexed", it would take a miracle to actually change the quality of his mind.

I have tried, however, to show in the last two chapters the existence of what might be called "porous patches" in Galsworthy's mind that developed and spread as the artist developed his insight into human nature. The artist of real stature grows greater with time, not because of improved technical skill, but because his understanding deepens and broadens. The more people he understands who are different

from himself--the more traits of character foreign to his own --the greater he becomes. This is perhaps more true of the novelist than of any other artist, for he deals most directly with human nature.

If the portraits in Galsworthy's last books have lost something in incisiveness, they have gained in sympathy. Galsworthy could not have created the older Soames, for instance, in his early books. On the other hand, he was as a young man inhibited in his understanding of women; he tried to recreate an ideal, not to portray real girls and young women with all the quirks and oddities of their individualities. In the character of Gyp, he came to a dead end. It was when he stopped making his girls different because feminine, when he gave them their share of common human weaknesses and temptations, of foibles and errors, that he found himself looking at the world with their eyes--eyes not seeing so differently from a man's, after all.

Fleur is the final flower of this more realistic shoot. Had Galsworthy never tried his hand earlier with Thyme and Nell and the others, there probably would have been no Fleur. In her we lose the sense that he is consciously trying to see how a woman feels and thinks. We are aware that Fleur is a woman, and that she is desirable. But her femininity does not restrict or bewilder her author. He understands her thoroughly, and makes us do so.

Dinny also indicates an advance in Galsworthy's understanding. She is, perhaps, a little too conscious a spokesman for the feminine viewpoint to fulfill the conditions of Mrs. Woolf's definition. Still, the Dinny who says "I wouldn't be a man for anything,"[16] is an advance over Margery Pendyce's poor country cousins, who trot behind. Dinny has her sorrows, but she has discarded pity for the wrongs of her sex. Through her, perhaps, her author has voiced a recognition that neither pity nor chivalry are, to a woman, the answer, but character. Also, she is her author's protagonist. Galsworthy found he could express himself through her. If End of the Chapter is a deliberate attempt to see the woman's point of view, the attempt must be acknowledged to be a good one.

Galsworthy never quite attained the complete sexual unconsciousness Virginia Woolf cites. But I think it can safely be said that there existed in his mind potentialities --the "porous patches" mentioned above; and that at the end of his career, the living figures of Fleur and Dinny remain as proofs that he did make definite progress toward that end.

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[16] Galsworthy, End of the Chapter, p. 32.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Abstract of Thesis

JOHN GALSWORTHY'S PORTRAYAL OF FEMININE CHARACTER IN HIS NOVELS

by

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(A.B., Hiram College, 1936)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1950

John Galsworthy, in 1929, was classified by Virginia Woolf as an author with a "single-sexed" mind, as opposed to the "androgynous" and therefore more fully creative mind. Consequently, being preoccupied with male psychology and values, he lacked a certain spark of interest for the woman reader.

This thesis is a discussion of the important woman characters in Galsworthy's novels, with the view of seeing whether, in his development of them, he did show evidences of the "androgynous mind", and consequently interest feminine readers. A possibility that Mrs. Woolf's criticism may have influenced his later writing is also considered.

John Galsworthy's literary range was to a considerable extent bounded by the circumstances of his birth: his class, nationality, and in much the same manner by his sex. For those outside his own order he showed pity and consideration, but some lack of real insight. His best characterizations were of people in the upper middle classes, and the aristocracy; with the poorer classes, as a rule, he did not do so well. Neither was he at home among his non-English characters; his Americans in particular were quite unsuccessful. His limitations were less obvious in regard to women, for he created many notable feminine characters; but in many instances, particularly in the early part of his career, he showed a certain inability to identify himself with them.

One of his earliest and best-known heroines, Irene Forsyte, Galsworthy called "a concretion of disturbing Beauty impinging on a possessive world."[1] He made no attempt to see her subjectively; she was present in the Forsyte volumes "only through the senses of others."[2]

After The Man of Property, in which Irene first appeared, Galsworthy wrote several other novels whose heroines followed a certain trend Irene had established. They were all beautiful, charming, and quite passive so far as their fates were concerned, until stirred to some positive action between two alternatives. All were victims of unhappy marriages, unable to free themselves for legal union with the men they loved. In creating them Galsworthy seemed to be living over an episode in his own life, and also striving to picture some ideal of womanhood, and its effect on men. This gave his heroines a dream-like quality, which made it difficult for the reader to share their feelings. Galsworthy did write at times from their viewpoint, but with only moderate success.

The women discussed in conjunction with Irene were Audrey Lees Noel of The Patrician, Olive Cramier of The Dark Flower, and Gyp Winton of Beyond. While some man critics found these women alluring, others shared with women the

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[1] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933) p. xii.

[2] Loc. cit.

impression that they were hard to understand, unreal, and a little too pitiable and helpless in the world of men.

Irene was never over-popular as a heroine with woman readers. One reason was probably that Galsworthy, while presenting her objectively throughout The Forsyte Saga, made more vivid the feelings of other characters more or less opposed to her--her husband Soames, her friend June, and Fleur, Soames' daughter by a later marriage, whose romance with Irene's son Jon was broken off because of the past. Another was the implication that Irene's unusual beauty made her a special case in the eyes of the men in the story.

In the final volume of The Forsyte Saga appeared Fleur Forsyte, daughter of "the man of property" to whom Irene had once been so unhappily married. Her love affair with her cousin Jon, Irene's son, was intended to be the final episode in the long-standing Forsyte feud; but Fleur's personality captured the interest of her creator as it did that of his audience. As a result, the three volumes of A Modern Comedy were written during the 1920's.

Galsworthy had written previously about younger, more ingenuous girls than Irene and the others, and on the whole he succeeded better in making them real. He showed interest in the way they thought and felt about things, although some of his methods were rather obvious--the use of journals and letters, for example. Thyme Dallison, Sylvia Doone, Nell

Dromore, Nedda Freeland and Noel Pierson were in some ways forerunners of Fleur. But Fleur surpassed them because her author understood her so well. She was not in the least idealized; she was spoiled, wilful, selfish, as possessive as her father; and yet somehow very appealing. Of all Galsworthy's heroines, she was the most completely alive, the one with whom her author most thoroughly and intuitively identified himself.

Fleur was perhaps intended to represent the spirit of the twentieth century, as well as "Forsytism" in her own way.

Dinny Charwell, Galsworthy's last heroine, appeared in the three volumes comprising End of the Chapter. In some ways she represented a return to the more idealized "nice girl" sort of character; but she had certain likeable individual traits--her sense of humor, her complete candor combined with good taste, and an actively sympathetic nature.

Dinny's story was the only one written by her author after Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own was published. The fact that Galsworthy made her his protagonist throughout most of the trilogy, and allowed the reader to see something of her philosophy of life as well as her views on personal matters, may indicate that Mrs. Woolf's criticism influenced him somewhat.

The researcher's problem--the question whether Galsworthy actually progressed in developing the "androgynous mind"--is something else again. Using Mrs. Woolf's defini-

tion of such a mind, a type that Coleridge cited as the really great mind, by which she suggests he meant "that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided"[3] it may be questioned whether such a mind can be consciously developed. However, the presence of what might be called "porous patches" in Galsworthy's mind may be indicated in his understanding of Fleur, who arouses instinctive sympathy in women as well as men. Dinny seems like a more conscious effort to present the woman's viewpoint, but she is a great improvement over the author's earlier attempts; and she is the first woman character through whose eyes he looked at life as a whole.

The researcher's conclusion is that while Galsworthy never attained the completely "androgynous" viewpoint, he did have certain potentialities in his mind; and that his creation of Fleur and of Dinny marked definite progress in that direction.

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[3] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929) p. 171.

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